Complication With Optimistic Outcome

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Complication With Optimistic Outcome

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Summary

People can't quite put their finger on what it is about Mark Zuckerberg. (Or, you don't get to rewrite the past without making a few ripples.)

Notes

This was written for the Round 5 TSN Big Bang 2014, in response to a prompt on LJ. It wouldn't have been possible to finish this without the ever-patient hossaviour - thank you for being an awesome beta and putting up with my terrible scheduling.

An amazing accompanying fanmix by uniformly (aka dustystars) is located here, while laenix has made some gorgeous art which can be found here. I feel terribly spoiled and terribly pleased as a result, and you should definitely check them out!

PART ONE

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Disclaimer: This is a fictional story about fictional characters based on not-so-fictional people.

[He doesn't know why it's happened, and he doesn't know if he ever will, but what he *does* know is the basic premise of his story, and it is this-

The last thing Mark Zuckerberg remembers is falling asleep at his laptop at the Facebook office in 2012.

He wakes up in front of his old computer at his childhood home in 2002.]

Complication With Optimistic Outcome

I.

As far as Randi's concerned, it all starts when Mark announces at the dinner table that he's decided to become a vegetarian.

"If you don't want any steak then no one's forcing you to eat them," their mother says absently.

"I'm being serious," Mark says, while wearing his serious face. (Randi always finds it amusing when her brother brings out his serious face). "I've decided not to eat meat unless I've killed the animal myself, with my own bare hands. And as that's not happening anytime soon, I'm forgoing the steaks, even though they're kosher, because it's my life and my choices and I need these hands for coding anyway."

The Zuckerberg family deals with this declaration with remarkable aplomb, but that might just be because they're all aware of the 18 hour coding binge Mark's winding down from (the one that left him wandering around the house muttering about security network infrastructures since 2am).

"What, has the internet finally gotten to you with its reports on animal mistreatment in the food industry?" Ari asks. "Were you traumatised by the life of battery farm hens?"

Mark's eyes narrow. "Don't talk to me about chickens."

"Oh my God, have they *really*? This is amazing. Randi, pinch me, I'm dreaming."

Randi snorts in response. "Tempting, but no."

"Girls," their father warns. "Really, Mark, what's brought this on?"

Mark pushes the food around on his plate half-heartedly, and then places his fork down on the table. "Starting next month I will be at Harvard," he declares. "I am evaluating my goals and ambitions, and as a result I think I'm having a quarter-life crisis."

"Dramatic, are we?" Randi jokes.

Mark shoots her a look, and Randi suddenly swallows her mouthful of quiche, abashed. Which is strange, because Mark's never had *quite* that effect before, and for some reason his glare reminds her of the looks CEOs use to intimidate patronising businessmen and lawyers.

And then Mark looks down at his plate with a slump of vague defeat that is shared among younger brothers everywhere, and the moment's gone.

Their mother's watching their interaction with a strange look on her face, the one that suggests that her brain is working on autopilot and psychoanalysing their gestures and speech patterns, or something. "By quarter-life crisis, do you mean that you're reconsidering college?" she eventually asks, curious. "Was it your private hope to take down Microsoft from the inside, and you decided on Harvard out of a sense of familial duty that you now sorely regret?"

"Of course it wasn't, you know that," Mark says, affronted.

"And you definitely want to pursue your interests of the classics and computer science, even when it means dealing with the general education courses and having to relearn what you might already know," their father says.

"*Yes*."

"I don't really see a problem then," their father sighs. "We've managed to survive four bouts of teenage angst, I think your quarter-life crisis is within our scope of manageable." He seems thoughtful. "I suppose it's as good a time as any to question your choices, given that you'll be embarking on a new chapter in your life so soon."

Right, because her brother's going off to Harvard, and she knows it's been weighing on his mind a fair bit even before he got (and turned down) that job offer from Microsoft.

"Mark'll be fine," she says aloud. "At least, until it sinks in that he'll be doing his own laundry and sharing a room with strangers and navigating the many perils of college life."

Mark scoffs, a familiar gesture. "I'm going to Harvard. I can be self-sufficient."

"I'll believe it when I see it," Ari pipes up. "We know just how often you forget to eat."

Mark doesn't rise to the bait, he just stares off to one side with a small frown in his face.

Randi wonders if this is something she'll be dealing with more often, because her younger brother's not exactly acting like she expects him to. It's rather like he's out of his element, in fact, which is weird, because he's at home with family, why should he feel ill at ease?

Nevertheless, she's feeling generous enough to throw him a bone.

"*So*," she starts off brightly, "Mark. Mind enlightening us to the reasons behind your most recent unapproved-yet-strangely-frequent coding binge? Don't be coy, you've got another one of your ideas battering around in your brain."

She is rewarded by the smile on Mark's face, which he hides when he pops a piece of tomato into his mouth. "Well," he concedes, "did you know that, despite its reputation, Harvard still doesn't have a campus-wide online student directory like Phillips Exeter?"

"I'm intrigued, tell me more," their youngest sister quips while taking apart a bread roll. She yelps when Mark kicks her in the shin, and Randi looks on, smiling beatifically, as the dinner table descends into a comfortable anarchy which dissipates once their parents roll their eyes and take charge.

Things feel different, but not *too* different. Even Mark has off days, she supposes.

Mark settles down a few days later, but there's a shift in his temperament and his stance that Randi can't explain, even though he's still *Mark*.

"Any reason as to why you've been acting a little off these past few days?" she asks while watching him write inside a notebook.

Her only brother shrugs. "I'm waiting for Leonardo DiCaprio to turn up and try to steal my secrets. I'm now starting to get the feeling that that's not going to happen because things are much too detailed and perhaps I should be consulting Isaac Asimov instead."

"...What does Leonardo DiCaprio have to do with anything?" Randi asks, perplexed.

Her brother sighs. "Nothing. That's the point." He gets up from his sprawl on the couch. "I have a migraine, I'm going to go to sleep until my head makes sense."

Randi hums thoughtfully. "Okay. You go do that."

Weird.

II.

Mark Zuckerberg has the dubious distinction of being one of the few freshman at Harvard who manage to earn a degree of notoriety before even stepping foot on campus.

This piece of information haunts the periphery of Oliver Kirby's brain, but only because it turns out that he'll be rooming with Mark for the foreseeable future. Mower houses forty freshmen, so it's a small dorm (and a far cry from the goliath that is Wigglesworth), but Oliver's still going to be sharing living space with three strangers, so yes, he's a bit apprehensive.

Oliver's vague fears turn out to be unfounded when he introduces himself to Jules and Noel, who are friendly and accommodating and enjoy playing video games (all good qualities to have in roommates). His problem now lies in the fact that Jules and Noel have bonded over their shared athleticism by discussing, at length, the gruelling training regimes they go through. While the two are outfitting the suite's bathroom with supplies and debating protein shakes, Oliver takes the opportunity to sprawl underneath one of the beds in their dorm room. It's a strange compulsion, but he feels safer when he's hidden from view and can just lie back and *think*.

Eventually, he becomes aware of a pair of Adidas sandals waiting idly at the entrance to the dorm room. Oliver peeks out from underneath the bed and, yes, it looks like the third and final roommate has arrived. The guy has curly hair, and sharp eyes, and looks oddly vulnerable as he stands there and takes in the chaos that is their suite-in-progress.

Oliver smiles. "Are you Mark Zuckerberg? Please tell me that you're Mark Zuckerberg."

The new guy blinks. "I am Mark Zuckerberg. However, I am now reconsidering my stance on being Mark Zuckerberg, because you're hiding underneath a bed, you look far too happy about my existence, and that alarms me."

"Please don't be alarmed," Oliver says earnestly. "I just found out fifteen minutes ago that two of my roommates are athletes who row crew. They're nice enough, but if you were built along the same lines it would probably have been enough to bring me to tears."

The guy looks down at his skinny, wiry body, and then back to Oliver's own lanky frame that is half-hidden by the bed. "You should save your tears for another day."

"Sound advice. Hey Jules, Noel! The last of our company has arrived, and he doesn't row boats!"

"What? Well, that's a shame. I was hoping we could convert you both to our noble sport." Jules sticks his head out and waves. "Hi, I'm Jules. The silent one over there debating between the cream and off-white towels is Noel, and the creeper under the bed is Oliver. He's special."

"Damn right I am," Oliver says as he pulls himself to his feet. "So, Mark, these gentlemen are our fellow roommates, the aforementioned Jules Campos and Noel Anderson. I," he says grandly "am the irrepressible Oliver Kirby, at your service."

Mark inclines his head. "Mark Zuckerberg. I don't row, but if you find a sword among my belongings don't be alarmed, it's for fencing and not decapitating you in your sleep."

Oliver feels vindicated as he turns to Noel and Jules and crows, "Ha! He fences. You can put that in your protein shakes and chug it!" He turns back to Mark. "In a strange turn of events I myself am a fencer, and so I'm happy to announce that with your presence, balance has been restored to this dorm room."

"...Wonderful," Mark says, gazing at Oliver like he's not sure what to make of this odd creature before him.

It's clear from the get-go that Mark's hardly your average fresher. At the very least, he doesn't act like a freshman, because Mark is surprisingly comfortable in his own skin for someone who stood at the threshold of his future dorm room looking lost and confused.

Oliver soon finds that Mark is actually self-possessed for his age, with a confidence that isn't rooted in the folly of youth. Oliver thinks it might be due to experience - Mark comes across as someone who is good at what he does and knows what he's capable of, because he's gone through the circumstances that have alerted him to those facts.

It's because of this that, even though he's the youngest in their dorm room (and this is glaringly obvious when Mark is blinking up sleepily from his laptop screen when he should have gone to bed *three hours ago*) everyone more or less ends up taking Mark's words on board when he points something out. (It's strange to think that, out of all them, Mark is the one that automatically gets how the laundry works at Harvard, and isn't fazed by hazing rituals.

When it comes to Mark, the oddities slowly unfold in various ways.

Mark has no problem finding and getting to all of his classes. This is something that they all learn very quickly, and it suggests that Mark possesses a working knowledge of all the shortcuts and nooks and crannies of Harvard campus and its surrounding environs, a detail which they all find infinitely useful.

("Did you download the campus map into your brain?" Noel asks as Jules squints down at the supplied map in question. Mark just rolls his eyes and drags them all to art history.)

Mark, even with this knowledge, avoids particular parts of campus when he can. Oliver doesn't know if Mark has anything against dorms like Canaday and Wigglesworth because of trivial reasons like finding the architecture off-putting, or if he's leery because he can't tolerate particular individuals from them and goes out of his way to make sure that the chances of running into them are slim.

(Not that he can blame Mark if this is the case - Oliver has an ex-girlfriend in Grays that he really doesn't want to come across either).

Mark is the most reserved out of the four of them, and he doesn't really attend a lot of parties and mixers. Sometimes he will if they're insistent, but most of the time Oliver gets the feeling that Mark is just humouring them when they try to get him involved in campus life. He'll seem perfectly happy to join the fencing club after Oliver's wheedling, yet show absolutely no interest when he's pitched with the AEPi opening party or invited to drinks at the Thirsty Scholar. And while Mark joins them on occasion, most of the time he rebuffs their attempts with a shrug and a nod at his computer.

(Oliver's only seen Mark get drunk on one occasion, and from what he can remember Mark had spent most of his time rambling on about Alexander Veltman and travelling back and timelines, which makes no sense because everyone else had been drunkenly contemplating what they saw in their post-Harvard plans).

Mark doesn't get a lot of sleep (and to be fair, it's college, none of them get heaps of sleep) but Mark's definitely operating on less than everyone else while still managing to keep up his coding regime. Mark is intelligent, and his wit is *acerbic*, and he comes to Mower armed with a laptop and a whiteboard, both of which are in constant use. Oliver's passion is linguistics, and while he and Mark insult each other in Latin and debate classical literature, he watches the codes and calculations running beneath Mark's fingertips and thinks that he's seeing something beautiful that he cannot fully comprehend.

(CourseMatch goes live within their first month at Harvard. Mark codes the program in a few days, and that's the moment when they all realise that their roommate's going to be the next Bill Gates. "I'm not going to be the next Bill Gates," Mark says in response, "I'm going to be Mark Zuckerberg." And really, that's so very Mark).

When Oliver gets back to his dorm room one evening, he chucks a packet of Red Vines in Mark's direction and heads straight for the fridge. Mark throws him the bottle opener, and Oliver cracks open his beer before settling down on the sofa, idly flicking through his phone.

"Hey Mark," Oliver says, half-distracted, "Mel needs a few people to help her with the distribution of notices around campus about the LGBT general meeting."

"Get Jules to help you."

"He says he's got something on, and Noel is too busy emailing his long-distance girlfriend back in Australia to help me out."

"If you expect me to wander around campus putting up fliers, then you are sorely mistaken and obviously don't know me well enough."

Oliver rolls his eyes. "I know you well enough to guess that you're capable of whipping together a template in, like, five minutes, that can then be emailed to Mel so that she can jazz it up and pass it onto Hughes."

Mark looks up sharply. "Hughes?"

"Yeah, Hughes. Never met him, he's some dude Mel's friend's roommate knows. They've already spread the word online, but they wanted hardcopy notices out by tomorrow. Turns out that the guy responsible for everything was kind of unreliable, so Hughes took charge. Mel says he's the one guy at Harvard she'd consider turning straight for."

There is no response from Mark, but there doesn't need to be, because Oliver just knows what he's thinking. "Oh, come on Zuckerberg!" he pleads, "I was drunk, and Mel is beautiful, and I don't need you to remind me of the epic rejection that I can only vaguely recall receiving. Please help us out?"

Mark sighs and stretches out his hand for the piece of paper with the hastily sketched out details. "In exchange I want vegetarian," he says. "And garlic bread."

"Done," Oliver says, already reaching for the number of their usual pizza place. Once the order is placed, Oliver sits back and takes another swig of his beer. He frowns down at the label. "Hey, since when did we restock our beer and get Samuel Adams? It's my favourite brew."

"I know," Mark replies absently.

Oliver looks in his direction thoughtfully, and then back down at his beer. "You know," he says, "we've been at Harvard for a while now, and I've just realised that you're kind of my best friend."

Mark's sent off the email and appears confused, until he looks at Oliver, and then down at the packet of Red Vines in his lap, and then at the beer in Oliver's hand, and then at Oliver. "Oh."

"That's all you have to say? I've just openly acknowledged our status as bros!" Oliver shakes his head. "Is this going to be a repeat of that one time when you reverted to one-word

responses after you found me watching Shark Week on the Discovery Channel?"

Mark's still staring at Oliver. "You know what?" he says slowly. "You remind me of these guys I used to know. And it's just occurred to me that, temperament-wise, you're essentially their spiritual lovechild." Mark groans. "God, I need a beer."

Oliver's already passing one over, and wow, they really are kind of best friends, aren't they? Not that it should come as a surprise, because while Jules and Noel and the rest of their friends and acquaintances are perfectly nice, Mark and Oliver have way more in common with their love of ancient history and their tendency to stab people with foils in safe environments.

"I thought I wouldn't need friends this time," Mark mumbles into his beer.

...And that's Oliver's cue to feel miffed or something, but instead he's just mystified. "Didn't need friends *this* time? What kind of high school experience did you have, man?"

"You know nothing of computers," Mark continues.

"And your distaste of my passion for the ukulele burns with the might of a thousand suns."

"I'm not the easiest person to deal with."

"I am well aware of that."

"If you start talking about feelings, I will kick you off this sofa."

"Repressing all of my feels."

"What did I do to deserve you again?"

"The Lord works in mysterious ways."

"Fine," Mark snaps. "You're on a trial basis because I have standards when it comes to best friends."

"So do I," Oliver says, grinning, "but I think I can lower them in your case because I know you well enough to know when not to take things personally."

Mark raises an eyebrow. Oliver extends the hand that is holding his beer. Mark grudgingly clinks their bottles together.

"Just don't forget me if you become rich and famous," Oliver says. "That's against our bro code."

"I'll just get you to deal with all the publicity for me," Mark says. "You can put that debating skill to good use."

"Fair enough."

It's the kind of camaraderie that comes from living in each other's pockets at college, and it's not the worst way to establish a friendship, Oliver thinks.

"I must point out though, it's not *if* I become rich and famous, it's when."

"I'll hold you to that, Mark."

III.

"This isn't much of a fair fight, is it?" Cameron says.

Tyler's only listening with half an ear because he's too busy looking over his brother's shoulder at the two-man sculls trailing behind them. The closest one is still a good three or four boat lengths away. "Maybe I should push you out," he muses, "to even the odds a little."

"With our current advantage I think that would still amount to a win," Cameron says. "Those freshmen back there aren't doing too badly though."

"Just keep rowing, Cam!"

Tyler learns on the way to breakfast that, besides being a good team, the freshmen duo Julian ‘Jules' Campos and Noel Anderson are roommates in Mower - and that Jules is fluent in Portuguese, Noel is Australian but opted to move to America for college, and their other roommates have signed up with the Harvard Fencing Club.

Everyone has succumbed to the siren call of food by the time Cameron is grilling Noel about the Australian rowing scene, but before Tyler can cut the conversation short so that they can do the same, Jules is waving at two students passing by and calling out, "Oliver, Mark!"

If Tyler has to hazard a guess, these are the aforementioned roommates - both of them have foils slung casually over their shoulders.

"When you told me you were challenged to a duel at dawn, I thought you were joking," Noel says as they come over.

"I never joke," the taller of the two replies, tossing his head. "Mark and Anthony's disagreements on Suetonius could only be settled through a clash of skill and wit, and Mark here refuses to lose to a man that reverts to ‘yo mama' jokes in the heat of battle."

"*Qui stipes*," Mark agrees.

Tyler looks at the shorter fencer, with his mess of curly hair and his languid expression, and shares a look with Cameron behind Jules and Noel's backs, because Latin insults, really?

"You pretentious bastard," Jules declares as he slings an arm around Mark and Oliver's shoulders. "Fencing, like rowing, is a gentlemen sport! There's no need for insults."

"You mean you aren't in the habit of offending enemies in dead languages?" Tyler can't help remarking (because he's sure that gentlemen of Harvard never back down from partaking in the noble art of exchanging slurs, no matter what Cameron says). "*Qui vir odiosus*! You're missing out on one of Harvard's finer minor traditions."

His brother sighs, but Tyler is rewarded with three looks of surprise, and Mark‘s face loses its sleepiness as he eyes Tyler sharply. Tyler can't help smirking. "You're not the only one around here with a good classical education you know. *Ascendo tuum*."

Mark considers him carefully, and then smirks in reply. "So you're very well educated. What of it? *Futue te ipsum*."

"*Antiquis temporibus, nati tibi in rupibus ventosissimis exponebantur ad necem*," Tyler throws back.

"Oh, harsh," Mark drawls. "*Cave ne ante ullas catapultas ambules*."

It is the first time that Tyler's been threatened with catapults in casual conversation.Oliver Kirby is laughing quietly to one side, so he's probably following their dialogue just fine, but Jules and Noel are openly bewildered.

Cameron's just unimpressed. "I am surrounded by children," he declares.

"Don't ruin my fun," Tyler says. "It's rare to find such an impudent First Year." He turns to Mark. "Mind you, you ought to have a little self-preservation. I'm row crew, these muscles aren't just for show."

"You think I should be scared?" The impudent First Year looks even more unimpressed than Cameron does by this stage. "You row a boat. I get to stab people."

There's a beat, and then Cameron bursts out laughing.

Tyler's still turning the moment over in his head in amusement as he and Cameron dig into a mountain of pancakes and scrambled eggs at breakfast. Mark, he thinks, is someone worth knowing, if only because he's shaping up to be an endless source of entertainment.

Divya, who's been told the story over his oatmeal, is now reading a copy of that rag known as *The Crimson* and muttering under his breath. "Hey," he says distractedly, "did you get a last name for that Mark?"

"Zuckerberg," Cameron says, "I think."

Divya looks up and frowns. "Surely you know him," he says. "I've mentioned him before. He's the Synapse guy."

"The one who made that music program?" Tyler asks.

"And who created CourseMatch near the beginning of semester," Cameron agrees.

"Huh," Tyler says around a mouthful of food. "Not gonna lie, I was kinda expecting him to be taller."

So even though Zuckerberg isn't the kind of guy Tyler and Cameron usually have for a friend, they're not adverse to the idea of getting to know him a bit better. He'll probably end up as one of those tech geniuses in the future, if his current reputation is anything to go by, and they're always open to expanding their circle.

However, Tyler's busy schedule of class, row crew and social events means that running into Zuckerberg is unlikely, even though he knows for a fact that Cameron's seen him around a few times, enough to have a few conversations that Zuckerberg's always the one to end first.

Cameron honestly seems put out by this.

"It's like he doesn't even *like* me," he complains. "Granted, he spent most of our initial meeting exchanging insults with you, but when I said hi last week he literally did a double-take. What is so weird about me being friendly that he can't get his head around? Am I that intimidating?"

Tyler snorts. "Cam, you're a six-foot two golden retriever, the only intimidating thing about you is the fact that you could snap him in half."

"That's not it," Cameron sighs. "Thing is, he reminds me of you, because he's not afraid to be an asshole, but I'm getting the impression that there are a lot of things he's not saying. Sometimes he looks at me like he doesn't understand why I exist. Other times I get the feeling that he's expecting me to do something and I'm not meeting expectations."

"…Why do you *care*? Do you find him attractive? Is that it? If that's the case, our conversation's taken a weirdly incestuous turn," Tyler says, because unlike Zuckerberg he can't pass up the opportunity to be an asshole when it's Cameron.

"Oh, shut up Ty," Cameron snaps. "That's not what I meant."

Tyler laughs, but the next time he sees Zuckerberg he figures, *what the hell*, and waves. Zuckerberg's response is to pause, look behind him, and then hurry off in another direction. Hardly the most encouraging reaction, but Tyler admits to himself that maybe Zuckerberg's suspicions are founded in some prior event that has made him wary of seemingly friendly upperclassmen.

Still, Tyler has always prided himself on being a likeable guy – the idea that another person he barely knows might go out of his way to avoid him is frankly offensive.

With this in mind, Tyler actively searches out Zuckerberg when he's on his way to lunch, and when he spots him sitting on one of the lawns on campus, it's easy enough to make the decision to annoy him and prove his doubts wrong. "Hey, Zuckerberg!"

Zuckerberg raises his head slowly and gives Tyler a cursory nod, which is as good as an invitation as any for Tyler to sprawl on the grass next to him. Zuckerberg's wearing a standard Harvard hoodie, and his headphones are curled around his neck, and he doesn't look particularly happy about Tyler's presence but that could just be Zuckerberg's face. Cameron once said that he had this thing when his features went entirely blank, except for his eyes, which sharpen into slits of blue that look right through you, like they can see the bits of code that you're made of and are taking note of all the little inconsistencies and weaknesses in your person.

It's almost a shame that Zuckerberg's going to be one of those tech guys, Tyler thinks, because he would make a great lawyer.

(Also, it's kind of hilarious that Cam was talking about Zuckerberg's eyes. He's going to get so much strife from Cameron if that kind of thing becomes a regular occurrence.)

Zuckerberg taps his fingers in an unfamiliar pattern while he waits patiently for Tyler to say something. When nothing is forthcoming, he sighs. "What do you want, Tyler," he says.

Tyler notes that it's not a question. "How do you know I'm Tyler?" he asks, just to be contrary.

"You're ruder than Cameron."

"Harsh!"

"But true," Zuckerberg continues, the smallest of smirks hidden in the corner of his mouth.

It's at this point that Tyler gets why Cameron looked at them weirdly that first time – Tyler shares a similar sense of humour with Zuckerberg, and it shows.

"You're also left-handed," Zuckerberg continues as he turns back to his laptop, fingers flying. "Cameron's not."

"Well, aren't you observant," Tyler drawls. "Cam's told me that he's run into you at the Cabot Science library."

"I've temporarily relocated for the fresh air," Zuckerberg says. "Apparently vitamin D deficiency is a thing and I need more sun instead of cooping myself up in the dorm or in library nooks. Jules and Noel are worried that I might become a hermit."

"Huh. You don't fit the usual parameters for a hermit," Tyler considers, "you might need to start growing a beard for that."

Zuckerberg glares at him. "Seriously, what do you want?"

"And what makes you think I want anything?"

"Why else would you or Cameron bother?" Zuckerberg scoffs.

And Tyler just pauses for a second, because *wow*. The way Zuckerberg says it, all curt and casual-like? Like he can't understand why Tyler or Cameron would be willing to strike up a conversation with him at all? Cameron's friendly in general, yes, but does Zuckerberg think that Tyler starts up Latin battles with just *anyone*?

Tyler knows that his status as a jock means that his friends and acquaintances are usually fellow athletes, and that he and his brother can expect a certain degree of popularity at Harvard because of that, if anything else. Nevertheless, Divya is someone he considers a close friend, and he isn't an athlete at all. Tyler didn't think that Mark, for all his reservations, could believe the Winklevoss twins to be so shallow, and yet...

Tyler's had an epiphany, and it involves Zuckerberg being a snarky college undergrad hiding issues of self-worth (or possibly just pride and anti-authoritarianism) under layers of workaholic inclinations and clever words.

"Your issues are noted," Tyler says aloud. Zuckerberg just looks horribly confused by this remark, which is fair enough. "Also, Cam was right, you do remind me a little of myself. Only you're scrawnier, nerdier, less confident, and not quite as good looking."

"…Wow, thanks. Were you always like this?" Mark asks, more to himself than to Tyler.

"I think so? It's all a part of my charm. Now, get up," Tyler says, as he gets to his feet and budges Zuckerberg with his foot. "It's time for lunch."

"What does that have to do with anything?"

"It has come to my attention that you are in need of guidance. You should be thankful that you are worthy of such notice."

"I think you're a lot worse than what I'd anticipated. And you're not my mother," Mark grumbles, but when Tyler grabs a hold of his hoodie and half-manhandles him to his feet he rolls his eyes and follows.

And that's how Mark is coerced into have lunch at Pforzheimer dining hall. Over salad, he circles around Divya and they talk low and fast about Microsoft, Cam making interjections as he watches on with benevolent approval, Tyler throwing in a comment or two that Mark returns in kind.

"I'm surprised," Divya says as he flicks his napkin off of his lap, "to find that Ty and Cam have managed to befriend someone given their absolutely horrid social schedules. Premier athletes just don't seem to find much time outside sport and their studies to do much."

"I'm a decent fencer, but I can honestly say that I won't need to worry about that," Mark replies with no small amount of self-depreciation. "Social events give me hives."

"Well, you're not completely inept or unintelligent," Divya says, joking in his own sharp way. "I don't see why you shouldn't be able to brave the Harvard frats. Your conversational skills aren't a total loss."

Mark isn't offended, and instead seems almost pleased. "Don't worry, I'm internalising all of my insults," he says, "secure in the knowledge that it is well within my capabilities to hack your GPA at any perceived insult."

"So, does that mean the rumours of the FBI watch list are true?" Cameron asks, curious and faintly alarmed.

"I'm not at liberty to say."

Divya gives Mark an imaginary toast. "Remind me to introduce you to Victor," he says. "You can bond over your mutual Microsoft job offers. Who knows, maybe Victor can talk some sense into you so that you don't upload your next venture onto the internet for free."

"I don't need your advice," Mark announces as he gets up to leave, "and if your interrogation is suggestive of some kind of weird ‘My Fair Lady' scenario that you've got bets on, I'm revising my judgements and wiping your existence from the Harvard servers."

Tyler smirks. "My Fair Lady?"

"My ex-girlfriend appreciated the classics." Mark nods at them all. "This has been educational. Let's not do it again. Narendra, Winklevii."

After his departure, Divya turns to the twins. "He's hilarious. And not as nerdy as I thought he'd be."

"Oh, Jules and Noel both assure me that he's very nerdy," Cameron says, "but he's a genius, and he's a little awkward and outspoken and rude, and that's all enough to make him worth liking."

Mark Zuckerberg ultimately proves to be one of their more unusual friends on campus, but all the second looks given to Tyler or Cameron seeking out Mark's occasional company is more than worth it for the conversations alone.

Divya, who has always deemed it important to be aware of the inner workings and people of Harvard, is almost put to shame by Mark. For someone who avoids most Harvard events, Mark is eerily knowledgeable of everything and everyone, and he doesn't have to be an avid reader of *The Crimson* to do so.

"Nothing happens at Harvard without him knowing," Oliver once confessed.

Tyler found this all too easy to believe when Mark came bearing gifts before the start of Christmas break. Tyler and Cam had surprised Mark with a new quality set of headphones, and despite Mark's sharp tongue he did appear to have manners when it came to repaying social niceties.

"Congratulations about the Porc, by the way," Mark says offhandedly while shoving a parcel into their hands, and then offloading another to Divya, which turns out to be a grey scarf. Mark is evidently the type of person to give useful presents, and the scarf suits Divya nicely.

Cameron, however, is blindsided by the comment rather than the gift of a pair of warm gloves that he holds in his hands. "The Porc? What?"

Mark bites his lip in consternation. "They didn't ask yet? I heard they were late with the invite, but I thought you'd have gotten it by now."

"How exactly would you know about Porcellian's punches for their finals club?" Divya says, looking very interested indeed. "Zuckerberg, one day you'll let me know how you manage to be so well informed."

"Well, I've said too much," Mark says, suddenly evasive. "You all...have a good break." He then makes a run for it, feet crunching through the snow.

"Coward!" Divya calls after Mark's retreating back.

"Enjoy your holidays!" Cameron adds.

Tyler shakes his head at them and turns his attention to opening his own present. As the paper unfolds itself before him he feels his jaw drop. "Zuckerberg!" he hollers as he picks up the offending article, "I've said it before and I'll say it again - Tyler Winklevoss does not wear earmuffs!"

Despite his quick getaway, Mark must still be within hearing distance, because he flips Tyler off in response. Tyler can't do much else but sigh, look down at his gift, and snicker. The earmuffs are the kind that wrap around his forehead and ears, and when he tries them on he supposes that they're comfortable enough.

"So this how the two of them show their affection," Divya says. "How quaint."

"I am going to give you so much shit for this," Cameron says, because he hasn't forgotten Tyler's comments from before.

IV.

When Chris arrives back at Wigglesworth, he finds that Dustin has improved the entrance to their dorm room by sticking a sign on the door that says 'WARNING: VELOCIRAPTORS ON PREMISE. ENTER AT OWN RISK'.

Chris sighs and shakes his head, but it's one of exasperation. His Harvard experience is actually going pretty well, in part because Dustin is a roommate that possesses a good sense of humour while being easy to get along with. Initially shy, Dustin's usual easiness had soon

eclipsed the awkwardness of their first meeting, and while occasional childish and quiet in turn, Chris finds Dustin kind and hardworking, and cannot imagine a better roommate.

It ends up being a good thing that Chris gets along with Dustin so well, because their other two roommates never seemed to be around to be worth the effort of befriending. One was always with his girlfriend; the other was just absent all the time, for no apparent reason.

(Dustin once suggested that the guy didn't even exist, even though his stuff was in their room, because it was all a sham. He was convinced that their fourth man was an elaborate hoax the Harvard housing office had set up for the express purpose of messing with their heads. "I've heard stories," he'd said to Chris. "You know Jenny Taylor in our year? She's been placed *at random* with two equally hot girls, Kelly and Ginny, for roommates."

"Jenny Taylor?"

"The blonde bombshell studying physiotherapy. You have to know who Jenny is!"

"I may have been too busy admiring Sam Kensington's jaw line to notice his hot girlfriend," Chris had said dryly.

"He does have an exceptional jaw line," Dustin agrees without hesitation, which makes Chris fall a little bit in love with him right there and then. "But seriously, what are the odds of the last five digits of the dorm room phone number of the three hottest girls in our year turning out to be 3-FUCK? Answer me that, Hughes!"

"So the housing office pulls bizarre pranks to cope with the tedium that is accommodation organisation. I doubt they're going to fabricate a complete person just to drive you mad."

"His name is Columbus. Who names their child *Columbus*?"

Personally, Chris thinks that Dustin has too much time on his hands.)

Besides debating increasingly outlandish conspiracy theories, Chris and Dustin have various friends (some mutual, others confined to particular classes) and an informal tradition for Thursday Pizza and Games nights in their dorm room. Attendance fluctuates each week, but Andrew usually turns up with Billy, and lately one of Dustin's friends from Econ, Eduardo Saverin, has been making an appearance after being issued an invite. It takes little time to breach Eduardo's reserve and general polite demeanour, but Dustin manages just like Chris knew he would, and Eduardo is soon slotting comfortably into the category of 'friend'.

It helps that Eduardo seems to like them well enough, and that he and Chris are able to bond over their mutual good taste in clothes while Dustin rolls his eyes in the background like the philistine that he is.

(It also doesn't hurt that Eduardo is not adverse to Dustin taking great pleasure in destroying him at Mario Kart, while Chris heckles each of them in turn like the world's worst backseat driver.)

When Chris walks into one such scene, with Dustin and Eduardo yelling at each other and mashing at buttons, he chuckles. "The usual best two out of three, loser foots the pizza bill?"

"Get your console," Dustin says, tongue between his teeth, "and expect to get thrashed, Hughes! Don't think you'll get out of paying by making us battle it out!"

"What he said!" Eduardo says, manoeuvring his vehicle so that he avoids the turtle shell that careens into Dustin's character, much to Dustin's chagrin.

"Oh, you bastard!" he cries as Eduardo passes the finish line. "I've taught you well."

Chris shakes his head as he sits down on the sofa with his laptop to check his email for a message from one of his professors. There's a notice about debating, and from one of his other classes, as well as an email from Oliver Kirby, who he's spoken with a few times at LGBT meetings. The title reads 'QUESTIONS OF SOME IMPORTANCE', and Chris is intrigued, so he opens the message and brings his legs up onto the sofa to get comfortable.

Hey Hughes,

Sorry to bother you but a friend of mine's working on a project of his and needs feedback. Do you mind terribly if you jot down a couple of ideas to the following questions? We need some outsider opinions :)

1. *When you first meet a new person, what (and how much) information do you feel comfortable sharing?*
2. *How do you keep in touch with friends? (face to face, calls, livejournal, etc.)*
3. *Would you be unhappy if you were quadded? What do you think is the main drawback for having to room in one of the quad dorms?*
4. *What do you think is the most negative thing that can be experienced online?*
5. *Do you think it is financially sound to avoid monetising a site while it's still in its infancy in order to appeal to users? When does advertising come into the picture?*
6. *What do you think is the best way to stop people from being assholes to each other?*

The email continues in this vein, before Oliver signs off the email with the promise to shout him drinks the next time they see each other.

"These questions are all over the place," Chris mutters, but he clicks the reply button anyway and starts typing. No self-respecting student ever turns down free drinks, and it's not the first time he's answered surveys for friends doing research assignments for other courses.

"Did you say something, Chris?" Eduardo asks, turning around.

"Nothing, just got an email for some feedback for a friend of a friend's project," he says. "Hey, Eduardo, how do you keep in contact with friends and family?"

Eduardo sets down his controller as scores roll over the screen. "My family lives in Miami, so I call them, and I try to meet up with people regularly - it just holds a lot more weight to talk with a person face to face. Dustin?"

"It's anything and everything for me," Dustin says. "Emails, internet forums, phone calls, you name it. If it was a viable option I'd totally be open to trying out pigeon delivery."

Eduardo wrinkles his nose as he considers the logistics. "I'm currently imagining pigeons swooping around in the dining halls delivering messages every morning. It's not a pretty sight."

Chris hums as he types these things down. While Dustin calls the pizza place ("We're splitting the bill, Eduardo cheated on that last lap and he knows it") Eduardo collapses onto the sofa and looks over Chris's shoulder. "Not monetising the site?" he says, forehead creasing. "What kind of site are we talking about? And is it advertising *for* the site, or on the site?"

"Could be both, I'm just typing down some stuff. I think Oliver just wants opinions anyway. Maybe it's for a Psych unit? So many new websites have been popping up since Napster, I bet academics will one day write research papers about them."

"Did someone mention Napster?" Dustin pokes his head around over the back of the sofa. "It's all about Friendster now, everyone knows that."

"Is one of the questions seriously asking you which of the following colours you prefer?" Eduardo asks sceptically.

"Like I said, maybe it's a Psych thing?" Chris looks up at Dustin. "Order's been placed?"

"Yep." Dustin collapses onto the sofa on Chris's other side. "We have fifteen minutes to give this email the full focus of our collective intellect before we descend on the pizza like a ravenous horde, so use this time wisely Chris."

"You have fifteen minutes," Eduardo mock-announces. "Dustin, name one negative online experience, go."

"It all started with the Star Wars LJ fandom where I faced down with an anonymous asshole in the comments section and started a flame war," Dustin begins dramatically, before he laughs and breaks character. "I bet you that Oliver Kirby will bust a kidney reading about it - Hughes, start dictating."

In the time it takes for three pizzas to arrive, the three of them get through all of the questions, Chris dutifully typing out everyone's responses in turn. After it's sent, they all turn to more important things, and Chris doesn't think much of it afterwards.

So that's about it from me. Is this a Psych project or something for web design? It's just that Dustin and Eduardo want to know if the college is going to chase after them or your friend with ethics contracts because they've answered some questions for a study without signing permission to take part or something.

Haha, thanks! Don't worry, it's a side project my roommate's working on, you won't be getting in trouble for answering a few of his questions.

V.

Cassandra taps her pen on the notebook in front of her. "Running a non-profit program like this will be hardest to sustain in its earlier years," she says. "At the very least we'll need to trial the mentoring program in schools so we can get feedback and see if they're willing to pick it up."

Erica hums absently. The lid of her pen is clenched in her teeth and she's examining the notes they have sprawled across the cafe table with a meticulous eye. "I think the main problem is getting people interested in spending their time mentoring high school kids. I mean, a weekly after-school program demands regular commitment," she says. "We need some willing volunteers from Harvard and Boston U, and *then* we can get in contact with a school, see if they're interested in starting a scheme to promote university pathways and all that."

Honestly, Erica has high hopes for this initiative, but the mechanics are taking some time to arrange.

Her thoughts soon grind to a halt, however, when a shadow falls across their table and her notes. "You should be speaking to the Education and Social Work majors," someone says.

Erica looks up at the boy standing next to Cassandra's chair. "I'm sorry, do you eavesdrop and interrupt people's conversations often?" she asks.

The guy shrugs. "I don't make a habit of it, but dire circumstances you know."

"Oh, really?" Cassandra says.

The stranger is looking down at their notes curiously, rather than at Cassandra or Erica. "Have you tried talking to any schools at this point?" he asks.

"It's in the works," Cassandra retorts. "If we're lucky we might attract some interest or funding so we can run a weekly program as a joint Harvard/Boston U project, and foster connections with some of the local high schools within the area."

"...Aren't you an Econ major?" he questions (and really, who does this guy think he is, anyway?)

"You say that like Cass can't hold ideals of social justice simultaneously," Erica counters.

"Noted." The guy is quiet. "I should introduce you two to Mel, this is very much her thing. Oliver would probably be keen to take part as well, but with all the things he does on campus I'd be surprised if he has time to sleep, let alone volunteer every week."

"Seriously, who are you and what is it that you want?" Cassandra asks, red nails drumming on the table.

The guy recoils. "Oh. I'm Mark. But that's not really important , is it. What's important is that if you look to your left, you'll see my roommate Oliver Kirby. Yes, the one who's trying to tell me to shut up via exaggerated and convoluted hand signals."

At this Erica and Cassandra immediately look to their left, and sure enough they can't help but marvel as another college student at a nearby table stops flailing his hands, turns red, and tries to hide himself behind a menu.

"He's very subtle," Mark smirks. "For some unfathomable reason Oliver's decided that - Cassandra, wasn't it? - that you very well may be the love of his life, although he can't be sure because he can't bring himself to talk to you and see if there's any compatibility there."

Erica sits back and watches the proceedings with interest while Cassandra digests this piece of information. "Really?"

Mark sighs. "Honestly, I have no idea. All I know is that he finds you attractive and wants to get to know you better and has taken to writing horrible odes in Currier. Therefore my motives are purely selfish," he asserts, "because when Oliver isn't busy with clubs and societies he has a tendency to pine in our dorm, and there's only so much outpouring of emotion that I can deal with on a daily basis."

"Right," Cassandra says, standing up from her seat. "I understand, I'll sort this out." She grabs Mark's shoulder and steers him into her vacant seat. "You, you sit here quietly and keep Erica company. Erica, keep an eye on him for me, will you? No flirting."

Mark's shoulders stiffen at the implication, and once again he appears to finds their notes extremely fascinating. Erica raises an eyebrow at her friend, who smiles winningly before waltzing off towards Oliver, who is both dismayed and delighted by her approach.

Meanwhile, Erica turns back to Mark and resists the urge to reach out a hand and poke him - perhaps Oliver isn't the only one who has trouble expressing himself with girls. "Well!" she begins. "Is this your first stint as wingman?"

She's pleased to find that she might have judged Mark prematurely. He has no qualms with meeting her gaze, although he appears pained - defeated even. "Oliver was supposed to be the one comfortable in all social situations. I am *appalled*."

She laughs. "How misled you must feel! We can't have everything." She reaches out her hand. "I'm Erica Albright."

Mark takes her hand and shakes it twice. He has a firm grip, although he quickly pulls his hand away. "Mark Zuckerberg."

"And now that we have been properly introduced, we can commence with living vicariously through our friends by observing their undoubtedly *fascinating* conversation," Erica says as she cranes her head around a passing waiter that hindering her view of Cassandra and Oliver's conversation. "Is it just me or is your friend pulling out a mini-whiteboard?"

"You mean the one that he's stolen off of me earlier? He assured me that he needed it for the diagrams," Mark says, before leaning back in his chair. "Don't give me that look, despite appearances he's actually put a lot of thought into this."

"And here I was thinking you put him on the spot," Erica says, eyes narrowing.

"Oh, I did," Mark says, blinking. "It's just that any good debater should be able to pull off an impromptu performance when the situations calls for one, and Oliver's oratory prowess isn't to be underestimated. He talked himself out of a mugging once."

"Seriously?"

"Of course, did I stutter?"

"Huh. You know, I can actually envision Cassandra and Oliver dating now," she says.

"…Because Oliver is highly persuasive?"

Erica catches Mark's eye and smiles. "Because when a mugger tried to grab Cassandra's purse this one time she broke his arm in three different places."

Mark mulls over this as Erica observes him carefully. She not entirely sure what to make of him, but if Oliver does hook up with Cassandra, there's a good chance that Erica will be seeing a lot more of him and Mark in the future. And Mark seems interesting enough, but Erica's not sure she wants to date him, and that's what Cassandra might be willing to encourage because she did it once in high school, to mixed results.

"I think that we should just stay friends," Erica says, deciding that it helps to be honest with these things.

There is a small furrow between Mark's eyes. "Is that a more socially acceptable way of implying, 'I never want to see your face in any capacity, please leave you creep?'" he says slowly.

Erica's smile softens. "It means that I'd like us to be friends."

"Oh." Mark's face crumples into an expression that smooths over too quickly for Erica to identify, but he ends up looking oddly...content. "I can do friends."

Erica opens her mouth to ask him a question, but then Cassandra's plunking down next to them and she loses her chance. "Hello lovelies, sorry for the delay!" Cassandra says breezily.

"It's just that Oliver and I have talked things over, and he's agreed to put his name down as a volunteer for the mentorship program!"

"Oh?" Erica grabs her blue pen and shares a smile with Cassandra as Mark looks between the two of them, flabbergasted.

"We're also sort of dating now," Cassandra continues.

Mark stares at her for a moment, and then hits his face with the palm of his hand. "Oliver's going to upgrade to sonnets now, I just know it. *Fuck*."

"I'll persuade him not to if you let me put down your name as well," Cassandra says, winking at him.

Erica's trying not to giggle. By this point Mark is looking incredulously at Cassandra. "I'm setting up a website right now, and my current record is ten minutes for making people cry," he says.

"So, that's a no?" Erica asks innocently.

"You're both terrifying," Mark says.

"I think," Cassandra says pleasantly, "that we'll be spending a great deal of time together, now that I'm dating your BFF. I'm sure that we'll all become *good* friends."

Erica laughs outright and looks back at the table with Oliver Kirby, who's scrawling something down on the whiteboard again. Mark follows her gaze and looks to Oliver, just in time to see him brandish the miniature whiteboard in their direction.

Mark, u dick :C

"Ugh, don't say I never do anything for you," Mark mouths back as he salutes Oliver mockingly.

When Erica asks Cassandra about what exactly happened when they're walking to her dorm room, Cassandra looks thoughtful. "Oliver was in one of my core classes last semester," she explains, "so I knew he existed, and that he wasn't a douchebag or anything, but that was about it. He's in another of my classes *this* semester, but until now he hadn't worked up the courage to ask if I was seeing anyone or, you know, remotely interested in him."

"And in the space of five minutes you decided that the two of you are dating?" Erica asks.

Cassandra shrugs, nonplussed. "I know enough about him to be willing to give it a shot. He's funny, he has a nice face, he speaks five different languages, and we have mutual interests. And unlike you, my artistic friend, I won't judge a man by his comical stick figures."

"*No*. No, he did *not* draw diagrams," Erica stops walking and nudges Cassandra's hip. "I refuse to believe that Mark Zuckerberg was being truthful about the diagrams and the mugging thing, that's just too farfetched."

"Well, I don't know anything about a mugging but I assure you that there were totally diagrams," Cassandra says with relish. "Also, I swear to god, we're planning on watching the BBC miniseries of Pride and Prejudice this weekend, and Oliver launched into a whole discourse about the nuances in Austen's language in the cafe, it was fantastic."

At this point, Erica decides that Oliver and Cassandra's personalities just encourage each other, and she leaves them to their romance. From what she's seen so far they actually have a chance of making things work, and who is she to say otherwise?

Mark never does sign up for what he dubs the Boston-Harvard Mentorship Program, but Erica learns that he's busy enough with his own brainchild, which Oliver describes as "Mark being married to a burgeoning website". Mark isn't very forthcoming with what exactly this entails, although Erica soon learns that it's some kind of social network.

("Is this you finding a way to get along with and keep in touch with people, without having to do so in real life?" she'd asked at one point.

"I can't say that the thought has never crossed my mind," Mark had replied. "I like to think that it'll bring people together."

"That sounds like a good outcome to work towards," Erica had offered.

Mark had bit his lip. "Maybe I'm being too optimistic, but I like to think so.")

Erica might not be a Harvard undergrad like Cassandra or Oliver or Mark, but she's known Cass since middle school, and they're close enough to keep in touch while they both study their degrees in Boston. Erica's previous thoughts soon prove prophetic when she finds herself spending enough time in the presence of Oliver and Mark to consider them friends (although she does not end up dating Mark, even though Cassandra throws suggestions at her and Erica privately concedes that she's not entirely adverse to the idea).

Any inclination on Cassandra's part to play matchmaker is thwarted, however, because Mark has placed Erica firmly in the category of friends, and Erica is happy enough with things as they are. Mark takes a while to lose the stiltedness which haunts his early conversations with her, but they're soon at a point where Mark can collapse into the chair next to her and wait in comfortable silence for her to finish her readings and initiate conversation.

"What is it?" she says eventually, looking up from her paper.

"Erica, you're in the top five of your fine arts class and you're currently doing a unit on visual design," he says bluntly. "I need your artistic expertise."

And that, in a nutshell, is how Erica Albright spends most of her weekend designing Facebook's clean and minimalist interface with Mark and becomes a Facebook co-founder.

EDUARDO

The AEPi party is hardly what one considers an example of Harvard's thriving fraternity life, but Eduardo is in good spirits, partly because of a great deal of alcohol and partly because he's just received an invite to the Phoenix and once he passes the initiation tests there's a good chance that he'll be attending better parties.

He coasts on this euphoria as he drinks rum-laced punch, chats with some of the guys about the possible algorithm between Jewish guys and Asian girls, and bemoans the lack of women at the party. Chris and Dustin are soon pulled aside by a few other classmates, leaving Eduardo with the need for some fresh air and a brief respite from the reggae music and the constant loop of the Niagara Falls.

Stepping out into the cold is rousing, but his vision is still a bit blurry and he's still a little tired. He tucks his hands into his pockets and breathes. It's likely that there'll be more drinking in his future if the rumours about finals clubs initiations is anything to go by.

Being punched by the Phoenix is a big deal, because while it isn't the prestigious Porcellian or the Fly, the Phoenix is famed for its social scene. Eduardo comes from an upper-middle class background, and he's made $300,000 on oil futures, sure, but other than his links to business and his future prospects he doesn't have the pedigree or the legacy or the athletic prowess that the final clubs tend to favour in their members.

Most students are punched in their sophomore year. Eduardo's a junior so his invite's a year late, but he has his foot in the door now. All the mixers and the bullshitting would be worth it, and he'd be able to call home and let them know of his good fortune. His father would be pleased. Maybe he'd meet a cute girl.

His drunken contemplation is interrupted when he accidentally staggers into another person taking an ill-advised stroll in the cold. "Oops, sorry," Eduardo says, almost tripping over his own two feet.

"You should – oh wow, that's still the stupidest hat I have ever seen."

"It is, isn't it," Eduardo says, turning to look at who he's speaking to. Aside from a nearby streetlamp, their surroundings are composed of shadows. Blue eyes, he notices. The Harvard hoodie is drawn up, and Eduardo's eyesight isn't at its best, but even he can see that the guy's footwear is horribly inappropriate. "You're wearing flip-flops. Aren't you cold?"

The stranger rubs one foot against the other restlessly. "I'm impervious to the cold."

"So…they're ‘fuck you' flip-flops?" Eduardo asks.

The stranger splutters. "Um, what?

"You know," Eduardo gestures grandly. "To show that you don't care and laugh in the face of conventional aesthetics and common sense."

"I mainly wear them because they're comfortable, but interesting leap of logic there. You're - that sounds about right. You're insightful for a drunk person."

"In vino veritas," Eduardo says.

"Yes."

"Sorry, I'm kind of drunk."

"I did notice. You don't have to apologise."

"Sorry."

"You're apologising again."

"I am, aren't I?" Eduardo leans back and looks at the night sky. "Hey, are you ever afraid that whatever you do won't be enough?"

After about a minute of silence Eduardo expects that the other guy - his brain mentally decides on christening him Harvard, for the branded hoodie - must have left already to escape his drunken ramblings. When he turns his head, however, he spots the figure a few metres away, also staring up at the sky.

"Sometimes I feel like I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop," Harvard says finally. "So, yes, I'm afraid that whatever I do will never be enough."

Eduardo breathes out. "You know, chances are - are good I won't actually make it into the Phoenix. I hear that they narrow the list down to twenty." Eduardo can't feel his legs and he's just *tired*. "It was probably a diversity thing," he murmurs, feeling foolish.

"Chickens."

"What?" Eduardo says, blinking.

"You're a Phoenix invitee, right?" Harvard says. "Well, here's a hint for you. Chickens."

"What about them?"

"What do you know about chickens?"

"...They make a good soup?"

"You're hopeless." For a second there the guy sounds almost fond. "Ever looked after a chicken before?"

Eduardo's mind finally catches up, and he groans. "Are you serious?! Shit, this initiation's gonna be a pain in the ass."

Harvard's smirk is palpable, even if it's shrouded in shadows and muted shades. "It'll just be one of the things you're up against. Go back inside, and tomorrow you can research the proper care and feeding of chickens while you nurse your raging hangover," he advises. "I'm feeling cold just looking at you."

A wayward curl of hair has escaped the confines of Harvard's hood to caress his forehead. Eduardo has the irrational urge to tug it, but he curls his fingers closed instead. "Yeah, okay. I should - yeah. Just, who are you? You're not a Phoenix senior...?"

"I'm not a Phoenix senior," Harvard assures him.

"So, what, you're just passing through and giving advice to random people you've never met?"

"Not like I could leave you to fall afoul of the United Poultry Concern, you'd never live it down," Harvard reasons.

Eduardo cracks up, and stumbles backwards towards the door that will return him to the party. "In a rush to go anywhere?" he asks impulsively. Maybe Harvard could use a drink?

"Parties aren't really my thing," Harvard says, shifting towards the direction he had been headed.

Eduardo feels his brows furrow. "It's college. You should get out more."

Harvard snorts."Not for all the cake and watermelon in the world."

"Alright then, suit yourself," Eduardo says, confounded by the cryptic response, but gratified all the same. "Thanks for the heads up, man, I owe you one."

"You don't owe me anything." Harvard turns from Eduardo to leave, but only manages to walk a few paces before he pauses, indecision wracking his frame. He sighs, breath dispersing into the air, and turns back resolutely. "Look, I don't know if it was a diversity thing, and I honestly don't care," he says, words tripping one after the other in their haste to leave his mouth. "You're the kind of person that will go places, Wardo. Don't worry too much, you'll be fine."

Harvard then hunches his shoulders and concludes the conversation by marching swiftly into the distance, footsteps receding behind him. He doesn't look back.

Eduardo is left with one hand on the door that'll take him back to the AEPi party. His hat is falling over one of his eyes, there is a dull throbbing in his head, and he still can't feel his legs.

"You called me Wardo," he wonders aloud. "Why did you call me Wardo?"

There is no answer.

(Eduardo's disappointment is soon fuelled by an obvious dearth of flip-flop wearing Harvard students. So much for *that* idea. At this rate he may never cross paths with Harvard guy.

He ignores Dustin's suggestion of skywriting and posters, and the looks that Chris shoots him out of the corner of his eye. It shouldn't be this hard to track someone down on campus!)

Chapter End Notes

Latin translations for III.

Qui vir odiosus! - What a bore!
Ascendo tuum - Up yours.
Futue te ipsum - Go fuck yourself.
Antiquis temporibus, nati tibi in rupibus ventosissimis exponebantura ad necem - In the good old days, children like you were left to perish on windswept crags.
Cave ne ante ullas catapultas ambules - I wouldn't walk in front of any catapults if I were you.

(Gratituous Latin insults, they’re super effective!)

PART TWO

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

VI.

"Did you ever want in with any of the finals clubs?" Cassandra asks Mark over a bottle of red wine and Chinese takeout.

Mark looks thoughtful. "Once, perhaps. Not anymore."

Cassandra hums. "It's just that a part of the whole college experience seems to involve getting drunk and living it up at parties. For someone who wants to put the entire college experience online, you certainly don't get as involved in it as I thought you would."

Her friend snorts. "I don't fit into those scenes, and I don't see why I should bother."

"Not one to try new experiences?"

"I leave that to Oliver. The man's going to brave the Fox initiations - better him than me." Mark shakes his head, and Cassandra knows what he means. Sometimes people click with Mark, but his brand of humour and personality often toes the line. Oliver's *amiable*. He gets along with people. Mark's the caustic friend that could offend half the party if given enough incentive.

Cassandra figures that Mark's just happy to create his own niche. She nudges his leg with her foot and smiles, and Mark smiles back in his usual fashion, as if he's trying to suppress his feelings but they slip through the cracks. Jules chooses this time to snore loudly from his precarious position of half-falling off the sofa, and Cassandra bursts into giggles.

"So..." she says, "I'm full, and I'm bored. Want to crash the Fox Club induction ceremony?"

Mark looks at her for a minute, and then shrugs. "Yeah, alright."

About fifteen minutes later they're both bundled up in warm clothes and Cassandra has unearthed her camera from underneath her Econ textbooks. Mark, exercising that scary brain of his, has reason to believe the Fox are somewhere on campus forcing their chosen into performing obscure drinking rituals and clandestine pranks.

"You hacked their emails, didn't you."

"I am offended. Gentlemen of Harvard do not hack into the college servers or student email logs."

"You've been spending too much time with the Winklevii."

"I know, it's terrible, the mockery levels skyrocket as soon as we congregate; they're horrible influences."

Cassandra stops and hits Mark's arm. "Wait, I think there's something going on near the statue."

"The statue?"

"Come on!"

Cassandra steers them through shrubs and around buildings, and as they draw closer Mark peers into the distance and curses as his eyes alight on the crowd clustered around the John Harvard statue. "Of all the final clubs in all of campus in all of existence, and we come across this one? I'm regretting all of my life choices right now," he whispers, voice strained.

Cassandra shushes him. "I want to know what they're saying."

"This isn't the Fox Club, this is the Phoenix," Mark hisses back as his hand grips the sleeve of her parka. "It's one thing to collect blackmail material on your boyfriend – I am *not* watching this."

"I didn't think you'd be such a prude. Ah, look, partial nudity," Cassandra says to herself with no small amount of satisfaction. "I was wondering when that would turn up."

"As the plaque reads," a Phoenix senior announces, "this is John Harvard, founder of Harvard University in 1638. It's also called the Statue of Three Lies. What are the three lies, Mr Dowd?"

There is a beat of silence.

"Mr Dowd."

The sophomore's dismay is evident even in the semi-darkness. "The three lies–" he falters, "uh, the first – aw, shit!"

The senior just smiles. "Take your pants off."

"That sounds so wrong," Mark whispers.

There is a general rustling amongst the students huddled together, until one visibly steels himself. "I know the lies," he pipes up. He's actually rather hot, Cassandra thinks.

"Ah, Mr Saverin."

Cassandra feels Mark shift uncomfortably next to her.

"One, Harvard was founded in 1636, not 1638," Mr Saverin says. "Two, Harvard wasn't founded by John Harvard, and three, that's not John Harvard."

"Who is it?" another senior prompts.

"A friend of the sculptor, Daniel Chester."

The senior nods. "You can keep your jacket on."

"What?!" Cassandra yells, momentarily forgetting where she is. "NO, MAKE HIM STRIP, YOU FOOL!"

The seniors and the Phoenix hopefuls are all suitably alarmed by this outburst, although many of them (Saverin included) flush diverse shades of red and purple. One of the guys slumps to his hands and knees and throws up, and in the ensuing panic Cassandra feels Mark grab her hand and pull her away so that they can quietly escape from the premises. Watching the Phoenix flounder around like headless chickens might have been funny, but one doesn't really want to stick around for awkward questions afterwards.

The distraction works well to cover their escape, but it also ensures that Cassandra forgets to ask why Mark was so adamant to avoid *that* particular final club. She'll remember that tidbit later, and puzzle over it, but for now the both of them take advantage of the adrenaline in their systems and make the long trek back to the Quad.

Fifteen minutes later, they're in their dorm room, without photographic evidence of Oliver or weird finals-club shenanigans, and Jules none the wiser. Someone - Noel, probably - has thrown a blanket over him.

"Strip-trivia, really? I expected more from the Phoenix," Cassandra says smartly. "Also, it's a damn shame that the senior made such a foolish error with allowing the Saverin guy to keep his clothes on, because I stand by what I said, that boy was *fine*."

Mark turns red, throws up his hands, and walks off to his room to sulk.

"I'll take that for your agreement!" Cassandra calls cheerfully, as Jules snuffles in his sleep and rolls off the sofa.

The next day, over a brainstorming session at Peet's while they're waiting for Mel's class to finish, Cassandra and Oliver are treated to the sight of Mark looking out of the window behind him and promptly slipping under their table with a muffled curse. The couple look at each other, and the now-vacated empty space on the bench, before Oliver gently nudges Mark with his foot. "There a reason you're hiding under there?" he asks, bemused, "or did you decide that the world was too much and a retreat to lower ground was necessary?"

"Ignore me, just go about your business," Mark's voice floats up from under the table. "I'm perfectly comfortable under here."

"Suuuure," Oliver drawls, unconvinced. "Let me know if you need anything down there."

Cassandra looks out the window to see if she can spot what exactly flustered Mark so, only to do a double-take and choke on her chai latte. She unceremoniously slips off her own seat and crouches next to Mark under the table. "Was that who I think it was?" she asks.

Mark is kneading at his forehead. "Please shut up, I'm trying to pretend that none of this has happened. Maybe I'm going to wake up in Palo Alto and find out that someone spiked my Red Bull with hallucinogens and this is all a drug-fuelled dream."

"He doesn't even know what we look like, there's no need to be so melodramatic Mark!"

A hand shifts a chair to one side and soon Oliver is joining them in the cramped space, his head brushing the roof of the table. "I'm really interested as to why my best friend and my girlfriend feel the need to hide under this table here, and I was kind of expecting more from the experience. A secret mini-bar, perhaps. Anyone keen to share why we're crouched in this confined space?"

"...It's the guy in the North Face jacket," Mark says reluctantly. He's looking peaky.

"...Do you owe him money?"

Cassandra blows a piece of hair out of her face. "More like I *may* have yelled at him to strip. Hey, it was dark, I had gotten through half a bottle of wine, and the Phoenix was there, don't judge me."

Oliver frowns adorably. "Well, *I* would have been more than happy to strip for you -"

"Oliver, don't you dare finish that sentence, I do *not* need to know what the two of you get up to when I'm not around!"

Mark reminds Cassandra of a defensive cat, all puffed up with his curls brushing against her shoulder. "It was one of those 'you had to have been there' moments," she cuts in smoothly, "when our attempts to find you and the Fox went pear-shaped. We'll all have a laugh about it in a few years."

Oliver and Mark share weird looks, and Cassandra jiggles her knee to get the blood circulating. "So, who's going to check if the coast is clear?" she asks.

"I'll do it," Oliver says, unbending his knees and leaving the safety of the table to reclaim his seat. "North Face is gone, but be warned, the people the next table over are giving us weird looks," he says. "Oh, Mel, hello!"

"Mel?" Cassandra says as she sheepishly seats herself back onto the bench, Mark following at a slower pace.

"Was I interrupting something?" Mel asks, one delicate eyebrow raised and intrigue written all over her face. "I feel like I've stumbled on a ménage à trois."

"It's all Cass's fault," Mark says. "How was class?"

"Urgh." Mel rolls her eyes as she sits down next to Cassandra, "if I hear anything more about torts I am going to scream. What's been going on?"

"Cassandra's been yelling at strangers to take off their clothes," Mark says.

"This sounds good," Mel says.

"I refuse to be ashamed or wilfully misunderstood," Cassandra declares, before outlining yesterday's events to Oliver and Mel. She ends up embellishing the tale like Oliver usually does so that by the time she's finished both of them have collapsed laughing onto the table at the image of naked college students freaking out, running into each other and collapsing in drunken heaps.

Mark doesn't speak throughout the story, and his face slowly regains its colour so that he's looking more like his usual self once Mel's green tea arrives. Cassandra catches his eye and mouths 'sorry' as she pats his hand briefly. Mark shrugs, and all is forgiven.

VII.

Facebook goes live on the 15th of February, and Dustin remembers this because Oliver sends him an email with a link and a smiley face. It's been a while since he's seen Oliver (they inhabit different circles, and it's been some time since Oliver shouted drinks for their reply to his email) but Dustin likes his style. He spends a moment admiring the site's interface before he signs up and creates a profile (fifteenth user!), and invades Eduardo's room at Eliot to cajole him into making one too. Poor Eduardo flounders because computers aren't really his area, but they manage to set everything up, and have just friended each other when Chris rushes into the room yelling, "Dustin, I found Columbus's Facebook page!"

Dustin feels his eyes grow wide with delight. "You didn't!"

"Columbus D. Wright," Chris says with relish as he leans over Eduardo's shoulder to type the name into the search bar.

"I'm sorry, who?" Eduardo asks, bewildered by the beaming faces of his friends on either side.

"Columbus was our freshman roommate that didn't exist," Chris explains as the page loads and Dustin marvels at Columbus's profile and the lengths that the housing office go to in sustaining the charade.

(Okay, so there's, like, a thirty percent chance that Columbus might be an actual person at Harvard, but Dustin Moskovitz refuses to be conned by the evil geniuses down at the housing office, okay?)

After his keen analysis of Columbus's sparse profile, Dustin gives up for the time being and clicks open Chris's own page, tutting at the profile picture he's selected. "Of all the photos

you could have chosen, and you went with that one," he sighs. "It looks nice, of course, but it's a headshot of you smiling at a camera - where's the personality in that? You should've gone with that photo I took of you last week."

"You tacked a fake moustache onto my face when I was sleeping," Chris deadpans.

"It's very you," Dustin assures him while Eduardo snickers. "Really brings out your best side."

Later, Chris will post onto his wall a copy of Dustin's icon with the amendment of red devil horns (courtesy of Microsoft Paint) only for Dustin to retaliate by posting the photo of the moustache-bearing Chris onto his wall with the title 'I mous-tache you to avoid disturbing my slumber, peasants!'

In the meantime, Eduardo smiles and chooses a beautifully rendered photograph of himself on some beach somewhere for his icon. "Is this what Oliver's friend was up to all this time?" he questions. "Because this is amazing. I'm tempted to share it with the Phoenix."

"It's your call," Dustin says, "but I think it couldn't hurt to show it to them. Not like they'll be forced into using Facebook if they don't want to."

Funnily enough, Facebook soon explodes over campus, with the Phoenix being one of the first clubs to promote the site. "I may not know computers but I know good work when I see it," Eduardo says to Dustin one day, as they stand back and wonder as this thing gets picked up and spreads like wildfire from one side of Harvard to another. Those in the Quad embrace the technology wholeheartedly from the very start, and soon people start checking Facebook as a part of their daily routine.

It gets to the point that *The Crimson* write a piece about it, and when the Bill Gates event comes up Dustin kind of hopes he'll see this Mark Zuckerberg there so he can congratulate him in person. After all, Zuckerberg's the friend who used their feedback to shape his site. His *amazing* site, which let Dustin know that the gorgeous Stephanie Attis of Andrew's art history class is single!

The room is packed when Dustin and Eduardo find their seats towards the back of the room, but when Eduardo's girlfriend Angie joins them and the talk starts Dustin hasn't seen hide nor hair of anyone who fits Mark Zuckerberg's description. Even *Chris* hasn't met Zuckerberg, which is a good indication of just how hard Zuckerberg is to pin down.

The talk itself is illuminating, and Bill Gates a legend, but when the floor is open for questions Dustin takes the time to sweep the room once again. He soon spots someone leaning against the back wall of the hall with curly hair and a black jacket. Yeah - that looks like it could be Mark, even if there isn't a hoodie in sight.

When Dustin sees the figure slip out the back door he whispers quietly to Eduardo to let him know he's leaving, and makes his way outside of the row, trying not to step on anyone's toes. The rush of cold air makes Dustin shiver involuntarily, but he can see Mark ambling down the path, and he hurries after him. "Hey, wait! Marky-Mark!"

The guy's head shoots up, and Dustin inwardly cheers. "Hey, you responded to that! And here I was worrying that you would turn out to be someone else, like a Boris or something. That would've been horribly embarrassing." Dustin beams. "I'm Dustin Moskovitz - does the story about a flame war on LiveJournal in the Star Wars fandom ring any bells?"

"It actually does," Mark says slowly. "It was your story mentioned in the question about assholes in online spaces that Hughes forwarded to Oliver. I can't believe I haven't hear it before."

"It had its fifteen minutes of fame, but that's all ancient history now," Dustin says, flapping his hand. "I've actually tracked you down because I want to thank you from the bottom of my heart for the godsend that is Facebook. Not only can I mentally poke at Chris from another class by writing on his wall, I can also feel hope again."

"...So, I take it that Stephanie Attis is single?" Mark asks, frowning.

Dustin stares. "Shit, you're good. *Scary* good. You must know everything on campus. I feel tempted to remind you that with great power comes great responsibility."

"I'll be sure to remember that," Mark says, before he pauses and bites his lip. "I should also probably be thanking you and- and your friends."

"We didn't really do anything," Dustin says.

Mark huddles in his coat. "You didn't know me, but you humoured me anyway and answered my questions and told Oliver about your experiences. I used some of that to help smooth over some issues for the site and lay some groundwork for the future. Can't have anonymous assholes doing whatever they wanted on Facebook, right? There needs to be protocol in place for that eventuality. It – I guess it meant a lot to me, that's all."

"Well, I'm glad," Dustin says, smiling. "After all the work you must have put in, it's good to know that it's paid off."

"Yeah." Mark gives him a wan smile. "I hope it has. So, yeah, thanks."

"Hey, no problem. And just so you know, I'm totally going to Facebook you because you seem like a cool guy as well as being a genius programmer. Expect a friend request soon."

"...Alright," Mark says. "In exchange, I'm going to take your comment about mentally poking people and do something about that."

Dustin feels positively gleeful. "Really? Have I just inspired a new feature? Sweet, now *I* feel like picking up a computer and programming my heart out, and I'm an Econ major."

"Don't let that stop you," Mark says, shrugging. "Just because you're in a different field doesn't mean you won't be good at it." Mark says this offhandedly, but it sounds sincere and Dustin's honestly touched by this.

Before he can say anything, however, a shout of "Zuckerberg!" cuts through the air. Dustin jumps a little, and even Mark flinches.

"Shit, I was hoping to evade them for a while longer," he says tersely.

"Evade who, exactly?" Dustin looks behind Mark, and is confronted by the image of a well-groomed and cross-looking guy, flanked by two blond, classically handsome twin specimens in jerseys with matching expressions that suggest they are *not amused*. "Friends of yours?"

"That remains to be seen," Mark mutters, before he braces himself. "Divya, do you really-"

"You turned down working with us on Harvard Connect for *this*?" the impeccably dressed Divya says, brandishing a copy of *The Crimson* in his hands.

"I really don't understand your relationship with that paper," Mark says.

"Don't play coy with me, Zuckerberg! You must have been working on this for months, and you always avoid questions about your project whenever we hinted about ours."

"Oh please," Mark rolls his eyes, "you know very well why I turned down working on Harvard Connect after Victor had to pull out; it was a glorified dating service!"

"You take that back!" one of the twins yells.

"What's wrong, Tyler? Did I hit a nerve?" Mark sneers.

"Can we all just shut up?" the other twin says, before noticing Dustin standing next to Mark awkwardly. "Wait, who are you?"

"Nobody," Dustin says at the same time that Mark says "Leave him alone." Dustin appreciates Mark trying to keep him out of it - who knew that the world of social networking could be so fraught with peril and intimidating upperclassmen with biceps to kill for?

"Okay, you've made your point about being pissed off. What happens now?" Mark is asking. "Did you just come to yell at me, or did you have a purpose for this talk?"

"What happens now?" Divya barks. "What happens now?! You're going to shut up and take our money, that's what happens now! We're finding Cassandra right this instant, she's the one overseeing Facebook's finances, right?"

It is at this point that the tall, muscular, blond twins hook an arms around each of Mark's arms and literally *lift him up* so that they can carry him away, Mark cursing all the while as his feet pedal uselessly in mid-air. Dustin's left standing and staring after their departure with Divya, who promptly tosses his copy of *The Crimson* into a nearby trash can.

"I'm sorry to cut your conversation short," Divya coughs, "but there are matters of business to take care of."

"No problem," Dustin says. "I see people being kidnapped on campus all the time, it's nothing new. Just don't beat him up or anything, I can't afford testifying in court and going into witness protection, I have too much to live for."

"I'll be sure to call off the mob enforcers," Divya says agreeably. "Remember, you saw nothing."

Dustin gives him a cheeky salute, and watches the other walk off purposefully while typing furiously away on his phone. "Chris is never going to believe me," Dustin says sadly, as the doors to the hall behind him are thrown open and students start to leave the hall in droves, filling the air with their conversations.

Dustin's looking for Eduardo and Angie amid the masses when a sophomore almost runs into him.

"Sorry, man! Hey, was that Mark Zuckerberg I saw you talking to earlier?" he asks, looking hopeful.

"Ah, nope," Dustin says, wondering whether Divya shares Mark's scope of knowledge about the student body of Harvard. He decides not to risk it. "Totally another guy."

"Oh." The sophomore deflates. "I was hoping he'd be here so that I could congratulate him in person, but Zuckerberg's kind of hard to track down, you know? He's not in my O.S. lab so I've never actually met him, but *man* the things he's doing."

Turns out the guy's name is Stuart, and he's soon joined by his friends Vikram and Bob. They had sat about five rows behind Dustin, and they're talking eagerly about Facebook while Dustin keeps one eye out for Eduardo.

"Remember how the speaker was saying that the next Bill Gates could be right in the room?" Bob says. "I bet you anything he was talking about Mark."

"I don't know," Dustin says absently. "Something tells me Mark wouldn't look too much into it."

Bob shrugs. "I showed up late, so I don't even know who the speaker was."

Dustin stares at Bob incredulously. "...It was Bill Gates," he says gently. A car screeches in the distance, which serves to highlight the uncomfortable silence that soon settles among the four of them.

"…Shit, that makes sense," Bob says finally.

Dustin stands there a beat longer, and then decides he's felt enough second-hand embarrassment for one night. "Okay! So, nice talk. I guess I'll see you guys around."

The three lamely say their goodbyes, and then Stuart and Vikram turn on Bob with gusto.

"Are you a moron?!"

"You can't recognise Bill Gates when he's standing right in front of you for an hour?!"

"Imagine what Mark Zuckerberg would have thought if you'd told him that!"

Dustin shakes his head and goes to find his friend.

VIII.

Infiltrating Harvard and getting into Mark's dorm room in Currier House is a piece of cake, in Joe's humble opinion, and after accessing Mark's timetable and checking to see when his last class is over Joseph has no qualms in making himself at home on the sofa. It's a cushy thing, and he kicks his legs up over the arm and makes himself comfortable while he waits.

When the door creaks open, Joe looks up from his laptop to the two people that have walked inside. "Hey, you're back!" he greets them cheerfully. "Good, I need to talk to you about Facebook."

The first person, the one he doesn't know, gapes at him. "I'm sorry, who are you?"

The second person, Mark Zuckerberg, programmer extraordinaire, simply rolls his eyes and tosses his bag onto one of the beds. "Joe, aren't you supposed to be at MIT?"

"Technically, yes," Joe says, "but it's a Friday afternoon so I made alternative arrangements in order to talk to you about your website. Be glad I didn't go to Princeton – the commute would have been terrible."

"What I'm more interested in," Mark's friend speaks up, "is how the hell you got past campus security into Currier – and *Mark's room*, nonetheless."

"What, like it's hard?" Joe says. He smiles and stands up, closing his laptop as he does so. "I'm Joseph Chen. Mark might have mentioned me."

"He might have. I'm Oliver Kirby." Oliver's expression suddenly clears. "Oh! You're *Joseph*, the one that helped Mark out with Synapse back in high school."

"Got it in one." Joe looks at Mark from the corner of his eye. "And as much as I support the idea of shared knowledge and free software, I can't help but think that if we'd sold Synapse to Microsoft there would have been plenty of revenue to cover the initial costs of Facebook."

"Hindsight doesn't much help much in that circumstance," Mark mutters.

Joe claps Mark on the shoulder in commiseration. "All is not lost - I'm here now, aren't I?"

"Am I correct in presuming that you're some kind of coding fiend that gives Mark a run for his money?" Oliver asks.

"You presume accurately," Joe says. "And if Mark's emails are any indication you must be inhabiting the role of spokesperson, because I'm getting the impression that you're Mark's buffer when it comes to interviews and, you know, human interaction."

"If there's one thing I'm good for, it's talking at people and being affable while doing so," Oliver says affably. "I've gotten adept at graciously turning away interested parties who want to buy Facebook, in order to avoid Mark's bitch face if anything else."

"Good man," Joe says approvingly.

"I'm right here," Mark says, wearing what must be the aforementioned bitch face as he brushes Joe's hand off his shoulder. It's fantastic - Mark has managed to cultivate the look of mild irritation he'd sported in high school into one that pronounces his disdain and exasperation all in one go. Joe gets the feeling that he's going to enjoy working with him again on this next idea.

"So," he says, rubbing his hands together, "my venerable grandfather had this saying about how ‘talk does not cook rice', so what kind of schedule are we working with here?"

Over the course of the weekend Joe meets everyone that forms Mark's circle of friends and Facebook personnel, and gets started on providing much-needed support to Mark's one-man coding band. He crashes at Mark's room in Harvard's Currier dorm and tries to tone down his personality a little because he knows he can come across as cocky to people that don't know him very well, but most of the time he forgets this because he's too busy watching Mark. It's a little weird - Mark is still Mark, but it's been over a year and at times he just seems so *mature*, only for glimpses of the petulant child that he'd been when they were in high school to surface in the way that he tilted his head or said a specific phrase as he fervently typed in his corner.

Joe had honestly been disappointed with Mark choosing to go to Harvard instead of MIT for his degree in computer science, but he has to admit that the place must have been good for him. It took graduating high school and going into college for Joseph to own his confidence, rather than fake it. Mark has mellowed somewhat, his edges smoothed over by time and experience.

It's still a little strange to see Mark like this, though. In emails Mark hasn't changed at all, aside from the fact that he's occasionally exercised a greater deal of tact.

Joseph monitors Mark from out of the corner of his eye, watching him write out things on the whiteboard with Cassandra, before he stands up and meanders over to Oliver, who's gnawing on a pen as he looks at the colleges that might sign up with Facebook if the option is made available to them.

"Well, what do you think?" Joe asks him.

"I think that sooner or later a lot of colleges will want what Harvard's got," Oliver says, "but both Mark and I have said as much – if Facebook does well here it stands to reason that Harvard students would then want to invite their friends from other colleges, right?"

"It's not just exclusivity, its connecting with friends," Joe agrees, "which is why I'll be tackling expansion, on the provision that MIT be one of the first to get in on the action." Joe looks at Mark and shakes his head. "It took this long for me to score an invite into your shenanigans, Mark, I thought we'd talked about this before!"

"So, we're tackling the Ivy League colleges, MIT and Boston U for now," Mark says to Cassandra, ignoring him.

Joe pouts. "Are you still mad about my disapproval on your chosen Facebook layout?" He isn't quick enough in ducking, and swears as a roll of paper with projected timelines hits him in the face.

"Whatever gave you that impression," Mark deadpans as Joseph rubs his nose and glowers. Mark smirks before turning back to the whiteboard, and when his back is left open Joe flings a pillow at Mark's head, only for Mark to duck and Cassandra to get hit. The night soon ends in Joseph face-down on the floor after Cassandra taekwondo kicks him, and Oliver somehow getting whiteboard marker on everybody's faces, and Noel silently judging everyone once he gets back from rowing practice.

Joseph takes back everything he's said about Mark's newfound maturity - the petulant five year old rebel balances out the wisdom well, and Joe's content to follow Mark's lead and make waves.

IX.

Divya is surrounded by the roar of the crowd as he watches the Henley Royal Regatta with clenched fists. Cameron and Tyler are good, but they can't shake the Hollandia Roeiclub.

In the end, the difference is less than two seconds.

Divya's waiting near the bar as Cameron and Tyler make their way over from their brief conversation with Prince Albert. Cameron looks like he might be contemplating how to best start a war with Monaco; Tyler is simply resigned.

"I'm sorry you had to fly all the way over to see that," Tyler says to him.

"I wouldn't have missed it," Divya says, and it's the truth, because he can feel the bitter taste of defeat almost as keenly as his two friends. They had been *so* close, and their disappointment is held in reserve but no less palpable to him. "How was the royalty?" he eventually asks, because it's probably for the best that Cameron gets that off his chest as soon as possible.

The furrow in Cameron's brow becomes more pronounced. "I just wanted him to tell me a couple more times how close the race was a couple of more times," he mutters. "Brutal. It was brutally close. Excruciatingly brutal. Never seen a race so excruciatingly *JESUS*!"

It's an unusual outburst from Cameron, given that Tyler's usually the quicker of the two to anger, but Cameron is more sensitive and when he gets mad it tends to build itself up. "Cam, the guy's the prince of a country the size of Nantucket," Divya says, "relax, it's fine-"

"Boys." And then Mr Winklevoss has made his way over, and both Cam and Ty's shoulders slump just a fraction.

"Dad," Tyler says, biting back a grimace.

"Divya."

"Mr Winklevoss," he murmurs, wondering if he should excuse himself.

Mr Winklevoss turns back to his sons. "That was a tough beat."

"Yes. I'm sorry," Cameron says, echoing his brother, "that you and Mom had to fly all the-"

"No, don't you ever apologise to me for losing a race like that. Don't *ever* apologise to *anyone* for losing a race like that."

Mr Winklevoss is a good man, and Cameron and Tyler manage to rally their spirits, especially when they spot another man heading towards them, who Divya recognises as someone from Cameron and Tyler's host family. Mr Kenwright is a London barrister, and he shakes hands with Mr Winklevoss and commiserates with Tyler and Cameron as a fellow rower - he'd been a part of the Oxford team many years earlier. Tyler's trying to sound upbeat about the loss as he talks about it, and Cameron's letting him do most of the talking.

"...It's just a shame my daughter couldn't make it this year, we always attend the Henley together - she's a part of the women's rowing team at her college, so it's become a tradition of ours. At least she's been able to watch it online..."

Divya's honestly zoned out by this point, but he perks up as soon as he hears the words "…a new website called Facebook. I believe you have this in America?" and he spins around to look at the twins. Tyler and Cameron have frozen, and for the first time since the regatta Divya feels his mouth grow into a smile. "Mr Kenwright," he says pleasantly, "would your daughter happen to go to school in the States?"

"Oh, no. Cambridge. Majoring in French Literature of all things - I wasn't aware there was such a thing."

Tyler's earlier despondency is quickly making way for delight. "They have Facebook in Cambridge?" he says, turning to Divya.

"Along with Oxford and the London School of Economics," Divya says. "America wasn't enough for Mark."

"Facebook was created by a friend of ours at Harvard," Cameron is telling Mr Kenwright. "The three of us are contributors - because of training we haven't been able to see what new developments Mark's been putting into place."

Mr Winklevoss puts a hand on either of his son's shoulders. "I'll just find your mother, shall I?" he says. "I think we'd be interested to hear you tell us a little more about this venture of yours." He turns to Mr Kenwright. "And I'm sure my wife will want to thank you for looking after our boys."

With their departure to locate Mrs Winklevoss, Cameron and Tyler turn to look at each other, and then at Divya. For now, the surrounding crowds of Henley hold no interest.

"Mark has a plan," Divya explains. leaning casually against the bar. "He's keeping an eye on how much interest is being generated by Facebook, and with more people wanting to invite their friends, he thinks he can sustain the expansion of the site to a more global scale."

"So maybe one day they'll have Facebook in Holland," Tyler says.

"If Mark gets his way, then I have no doubt," Cameron says.

Tyler's got the cheerful glint back in his eyes. "You know what? Today we lost to the Dutch," he says, "and it was a good race, and they'll see us again and we'll be ready for them next time. Until then, it's interesting to note that I care a hell of a lot more about how Facebook is doing. I mean, it's Mark's brainchild, and it's doing well, and we've gotten *invested*. How do you think Hollandia Roeiclub would react to a Facebook invite?"

"Working on the expansion Facebook's sphere of influence already?" Divya asks, amused.

"Why not? Can't leave it all to Mark. Facebook reached Yale, Colombia and Stanford two months ago. Mark didn't even *mention* he was planning for England." Cameron shakes his head. "I'm going to gut that freakin' nerd."

Divya can't help laughing at this. "Sounds like he wasn't planning on informing you two until after the race," he says, pulling back and grasping at Tyler's shoulder. "Guess he thought you had other things to concern yourself with. In any case, it's a nice surprise."

"Oh, it *is*," Tyler says with great relish. "Gentlemen, I am getting us drinks."

So I hope that their defeat at the hands of the Dutch hasn't quelled their fighting spirit, because I'm stepping up with the work on Facebook. Right now Joseph and I are bearing the brunt of things programming-wise. I think I'll need to start hiring interns soon.

I'm going to establish an office in Boston, I think it's about time.

Also, I'm dropping out of Harvard.

Mark, we REALLY need to talk about your communication issues. Check your messages, Cam and Ty need to rant at you for a bit.

Also, fair warning, Cam might hug you when we get back.

And Tyler might punch you. You're dropping out???

I have never seen Cam make so many spelling errors, is he drunk?

I can't tell if it says 'Wish you were here' or 'Wish you hell'.

He's just slightly tipsy. Enough for bad hand-eye coordination.

It's all the horrible warm beer they have over here.

Back to my previous question that you've ignored?

This summer, I'm thinking about renting a place in Boston for Facebook. I'll get a few people involved with the coding, and if things get rolling I'll probably just not go to Harvard next semester.

If you're serious about this

(and I know you are)

then we'll talk more when we get back. It'll take some time to find a place.

Cassandra's father's in real estate, we'll find a place.

I have some money from a few programming jobs

and between the four of us we should be able to cover the costs.

Programming jobs?

You've had time to make a little more on the side to finance Facebook?

Do you ever sleep?

Sleep is for the weak.

X.

The meeting with Peter Thiel would have been more nerve-wracking if Mark hadn't seemed so blasé about it, Cameron decides. It had all started when everyone agreed that Cameron would be the one to accompany Mark to the meeting, because after connections were reached out to in organising possible angel investors it had been Tyler and Cameron (and, surprisingly, Mel) that had pulled through and gotten the damn thing organised. Tyler had eyeballed his brother before declaring that Mark and Cameron could probably manage on their own and represent everybody while making their pitch, "because Mark is the brains of the operation and can intimidate business reps with a well-placed death glare, while Cam brings class and the air of a gentleman for legitimacy."

Everyone else would be waiting at the newly acquired Boston Facebook office, to hear if they'd acquired their angel investor or if they'd have to start over and find someone else who was interested in Facebook and not just in buying it off.

Which all leads up to why Cameron is wearing his best suit, and waiting next to his car for Mark before nine in the morning. He'd been insistent on the need to arrive on time, and so he's fidgeting with his tie and keeping an eye on his watch when he hears the footfalls approaching. "Good, we'll have plenty of time to drive there," Cameron says, before he looks up and almost throws a fit at what Mark is wearing. "Jesus, I thought I told Oliver to lay out the suit! Why aren't you wearing the suit?!"

Needless to say, the first ten minutes of the drive involve Cameron and Mark arguing about Mark's sartorial choices.

"There is a *reason* that Ty, Div and I bought that suit for you last year! So you can wear it when you want to impress people like Peter Thiel! Did you expect to turn up to business meetings and speak to financial investors in your godforsaken jeans?"

"Yes, actually," Mark says stiffly. "This is what I wear; if I need to impress people like Peter Thiel, I won't be wearing a suit, I'll be in front of a computer explaining to him why I am good at what I do and bringing up the numbers that prove it."

Cameron sighs and glances balefully in Mark's direction. He sometimes forgets that Mark's still an anarchist at heart that privately shakes his fist at The Man, or whatever, because even though Mark doesn't always subscribe to social conventions he also doesn't usually make a big deal out of his subversion of them either. He just does whatever he wants, like wearing flip-flops in minus zero weather, or dropping out of college because 'it's probably time'.

(Admittedly, Mark's wearing a brand new hoodie, his cleanest pair of jeans, and converses. He's obviously put some effort into what he's wearing, that much Cameron can tell. Would it have killed him to wear a better shirt or a blazer though?)

"I can sense your disapproval," Mark says as he gazes out the window. "I'm not Divya, or your brother, or you – suits don't make me comfortable in the least."

"I know. I should have seen this coming. I guess people will just have to be willing to overlook a few things when it's the CEO and founder of Facebook." Cameron smiles wryly to himself as he makes a right turn. "Just keep in mind that you're representing Facebook now. You have a reputation to maintain."

"So that's a no to hookers and drugs?"

"Not if you know what's good for you," Cameron snorts. "Although I have a hard time imagining that scenario. I don't think I need to remind you about the need to avoid acting so awkwardly next time someone propositions you, because rest assured that Ty will never let you forget it."

The train wreck that was a cute sophomore girl brazenly going up to Mark last weekend at a bar is a memory that Tyler will probably end up treating like the family silver - namely, by taking it out occasionally to polish up and display in order to embarrass Mark in private company. It's enough to make Cameron pity Mark, much like he did when he politely ushered the girl away as Mark tried to drown himself in vodka.

Mark has currently turned his face away to look out the window, but his ears are red. "That was *one time*, stop talking about it."

"Okay," Cameron says, even though he distinctly remembers Mark muttering "God, not *again,*" into his glass. He feels his hands tighten on the steering wheel, and he tries to sound as casual as Mark normally does. "She was pretty, though, I'm surprised you shut her down so quickly. Is it because you and Erica are dating, or…?"

"*No*, we're not - and we're not talking about it either."

"Cassandra will be disappointed."

"Not my problem."

"She'll interrogate all of your future dates."

Mark's hands fiddle with the hem of his hoodie. "I find that highly unlikely. I don't have time for dating."

Mark's focus when it comes to Facebook is evident in the way he ‘wires in' with an intensity that borders on maniacal. Cameron's of the mind that Mark should spend a little less time throwing himself into his work and a little more time being social offline – start-ups demand so much, and Cameron's heard from his father how many entrepreneurs find themselves investing time and money into their endeavours only to discover that they've neglected everything else by the wayside.

Cameron doesn't have the courage to bring this up with Mark, because he's starting to get how Mark thinks after knowing him for over a year. Mark wants to give up college because

it's infringing on the demands of Facebook, but he's been maintaining his (by Cameron's standards) quiet social life of dinners with friends and select gatherings as per usual. Something tells Cameron that everyone's reminders to Mark about his need to exist away from his laptop are merely affirmations for something Mark already knows.

Maybe Cameron is being fanciful, but there's something about the way Mark holds himself and the look he gets when he thinks nobody is watching. Mark's been burned once before, that much Cameron can surmise. He's just not sure what it is - sometimes Mark is just weird, and Erica's the only other person that seems to have recognised this and said as much to Cameron.

"Something to think about for the future then," he says, "when Facebook doesn't consume as much of your time."

"Perhaps," Mark murmurs noncommittally.

The rest of the trip is light-hearted banter and safer topics, and the meeting with Peter Thiel goes better than expected. Cameron speaks about Facebook's business and growth, his mind swimming with Oliver and Cassandra's notes from the night before, and Mark clicks with Peter as he outlines his plans for the future. Cameron can only marvel at this erudite, persuasive Mark Zuckerberg, who's looking as excited as he ever gets, his passion united with an understanding for how things will work and what Facebook needs to make to make it out of Boston and out of colleges and into the world. It's like staring at what Mark will be like as a CEO, older and wiser and not just a college drop-out with a good idea.

Peter Thiel must be equally mystified by what he sees before him, if his questions on Mark's initial ideas, his family and his philosophy for the company are any indication. Mark easily evades the man's prodding about how he's come to cultivate his natural discernment of the way to run a business, as well as an intellectual enterprise, with candour. "I'm the acting CEO of Facebook. Just because I'm young doesn't mean I'm an idiot." Mark shoots Cameron a smile. "It also helps to have good people to work with."

They get Peter on board, and Cameron mentally pumps his fist in the air.

"Just don't fuck it up," Peter says, shaking Mark's hand.

"Oh, I don't intend to," Mark replies.

The place they've chosen to be the official headquarters of Facebook is a small two-storey office building in Boston, a short bus ride from Harvard U. By the time they pull up before it, Cameron's feeling constricted in his suit, and thinking longingly of his gym gear. He feels Mark's eyes on him as he unravels his tie. "What?" he asks.

"Bet my hoodie's looking a lot more suitable now," Mark says.

"Oh, ha ha."

Mark's answering grin is *impish*, and he picks up a bag on the floor of the back seat and throws it at Cameron. Cameron deftly catches the bag and opens it to find one of his old shirts and a spare pair of trousers. "Huh, someone came prepared."

"Erica says the place needs painting, so we've all been summoned to make the place presentable as a business. Cassandra refuses to work in a dodgy place with atrocious yellow wallpaper, and Divya seconded her opinion."

"Can't believe we've gotten to this point already," Cameron says, looking up at the building and shielding his eyes from the sun. "When you first said you were going to drop out, I didn't imagine you'd get the ball rolling so quickly."

"I'm certain that I won't be returning to Harvard after break," Mark says bluntly. "I've delayed enough as it is. Joe's finishing up his degree soon, so once he graduates he'll be joining me here, and I've already got some interns lined up to help with the work. Cassandra and Oliver will be going back to Harvard - we're not planning to bring in much advertising just yet so Cassandra will be keeping track of our finances and Oliver can continue being spokesperson from the dorm. You, Tyler and Divya are welcome let me know what you eventually decide to do, but either way you're invested in this like the rest of us, so I expect you to all pull your own weight."

Cameron looks down at Mark thoughtfully. "I'm surprised Oliver's not coming out here with you, considering how much time he's spent with you and Joe and all the phone calls he's been making. How he finds the time to do all of this and continue his co-curricular activities is something I'll never understand."

"He said he could cut back and manage things, and I trust he's up to it if he says so. Anyway, we've talked about it, and I thought that at least *one* of us should get a degree," Mark says as he heads for the front door of the Facebook office.

Cameron slings his bag of clothes over his shoulder and follows Mark. "It's all about compromising, isn't it?"

"Yeah. This is it for me, but I can't just expect Oliver or Cassandra to drop everything and follow my lead. Oliver has his scholarship to worry about, and the day I tell Cassandra to do anything she doesn't want to is the day I die an ignoble death."

"And Erica?"

"Should be inside with her materials ready. She wants to paint a mural on one of the walls."

Cameron chuckles. "I'm not sure this is what I expected when I got into this business. Not that I'm complaining."

"It's dangerous, going into business with friends," Mark say, almost inaudibly. "Sometimes, though, you get lucky."

The second floor of the building mostly consists of an open floor plan, and Oliver's busy rolling covers onto the polished wooden floor to protect it from paint. "Hey, there you two are!" he says pleasantly. "Any good news to share with the class?"

"The best," Cameron says, beaming.

Oliver whoops. "Hell yeah!" He grabs Cassandra by the hands and whisks her around the room, the two of them giggling madly.

"Ugh, you two are sickening," Mark says, but he's tapping his foot and grinning, and soon the eight people that make up the inner circle of Facebook are clustered within the room, talking and laughing. Divya (who for once isn't dressed to impress but wearing an old button up) is ruffling Mark's hair and talking about the need for champagne, while Erica and Joe are trying to talk with Mark about what exactly happened at the meeting, *tell us everything*.

Tyler just shakes his head at everybody and pulls his twin into a hug. "This is it, Cam. This is *it*," he hisses. Cameron feels heady as he looks at his twin, and they share identical smiles, exactly like they'd once done when they'd picked up oars for the very first time, and got their acceptance letters from Harvard.

Cassandra claps her hands sharply to get everyone's attention. "Okay! So we've snagged ourselves an angel investor, now I want this office to actually look like a Facebook office! Choose your weapons, and by weapons I mean if you'll be using a roller or a paintbrush." She then wrinkles her nose. "And Cameron, you should really change out of that suit. Mark's already got his hands on a paintbrush, he might be harbouring a grudge about any foolish comment of yours about his beloved hoodies and plotting revenge accordingly."

Mark, who has taken off his hoodie, crosses his arms over his 'I love sloths' t-shirt. "Cameron, take note that the only reason I'm not flinging paint at you right now is because I don't want you to cry if I ruin your suit."

"You're an asshole," Cameron says.

Mark smirks. "I know."

("Your flirting is painful to watch," Tyler says under his breath as he walks past with a roller. Cameron kicks him in the shin.)

EDUARDO

Eduardo's connection with the Phoenix and with his father nabs him an internship in a well-known firm in New York, where his job involves a great deal of time analysing stock valuations in a little cubicle. He does what's expected of him, using what he's learned from

the Phoenix punch process to get things done and get along with his co-workers and fellow interns.

When he's not working on his internship, he logs into Facebook and carefully types messages to people back in Boston, posts updates that say how much he's enjoying the chance to work in New York. He gets into a poking war with Dustin, and sends Chris pictures of the view from his apartment window, and even though the three of them are on the outskirts of the Facebook phenomenon they are all eager to see how this pans out.

Dustin's messages tell Eduardo about how his work ethic is being invested into mastering Linux, while Chris's messages tell him stories of VCs tracking down Mark and Oliver Kirby in lectures, and rattling off six-figure sums to the CFO Cassandra Uberti in the hopes of buying Facebook off their hands.

It all sounds crazy - more so because it's all true.

A week into his internship, Eduardo gets talking with an intern from Yale, Jessica, and as they exchange Facebook addresses she does a double-take at seeing his name. "Wow, I didn't realise you might be *that* Eduardo Saverin. I should have known, you're from Harvard, aren't you?"

Eduardo's confused, but he just plays the conversation out casually and says that he is, and after drinks with everyone that evening Eduardo sits on his bed with his laptop and studies Facebook carefully. He'll never be an IT professional, but he can navigate the site well enough to use it as the social networking tool it is, and it soon occurs to him that he's never actually paid much attention to the features of the site.

Like, for example, the blue header which has a coded image of what appears to be Nikola Tesla. Eduardo hasn't noticed that before. At the bottom of every page is 'A Zuckerberg Production' in small font as well, that's new to him.

And on the page which lists Facebook's founders, none of which Eduardo personally knows, he scrolls down and finds his name. And when Eduardo blinks, and rubs his eyes, his name is still listed there in black and white, for everyone to see.

Contributors:

Cameron Winklevoss

Tyler Winklevoss

Divya Narendra

Melissa Santiago

Christopher Hughes

Eduardo Saverin

Dustin Moskovitz

Julian Campos

Noel Reed

Lynda Tran

Mark Zuckerberg has put down Eduardo as a contributor on his website. His website, which is gaining users every day, where he orchestrates people's social lives.

Eduardo hasn't even *met* Mark Zuckerberg.

Clicking onto Mark's Facebook profile doesn't give Eduardo a great deal of information about the guy, except for things like his love of Daft Punk and this book series called Game of Thrones. What arrests Eduardo's attention, however, is the icon picture of Mark looking over his shoulder, his face illuminated by the light of a window and the computer screen.

He... he looks a little like Harvard guy. Granted, it was dark, and he'd been drunk, but Eduardo still remembers enough of that night to agree that Mark's face sort of fits the profile. There's something familiar about his eyes, and the curve of his mouth...

"Oh my God," Eduardo says hoarsely.

Eventually, after hitting his head against the wall a few times and trying to drown himself in the shower, Eduardo is refreshed and in bed and grimly sending Mark a friend request. He spends the rest of the night trying to come up with introductory messages that don't sound lame. It's not like he can just thank Mark about the heads-up about the chickens, that's *stupid*.

Eduardo spends the rest of the week trying not to hate his internship too much, and the fact that while he might make a good businessman in the future the CFO of Facebook is probably doing more practical things with her time. Eduardo's connection with Facebook, tenuous as it is, will mean something to his father, but it's just as likely to end up with Eduardo being on the receiving end of one of his father's lectures on the need to take initiative and make something of himself like how these people at Facebook are doing. He can imagine being eyeballed already.

By the time Eduardo collapses onto his bed and opens up Facebook, he's half-expecting to never hear from Mark Zuckerberg, who's obviously the kind of person that gets loads of friend requests daily, and hangs out with people like the Winklevoss twins, and has news articles portraying him as a nerd who's 'made good' in his quest to surpass Bill Gates.

Instead, he comes face to face with a notification that tells him he's been accepted as Mark's friend, and can now see his photos and stalk him online to his heart's content. Now he just

needs to find a way to get Mark to admit if he's been walking around in the snow in flip-flops having vaguely meaningful conversations with drunken college undergrads gunning for the Phoenix.

He has start somewhere though, and so he opens a message box.

Contributor?

It takes less than a minute for Eduardo to get a response.

The story about the anonymous troll is worth at least that much.

Dustin thought you'd like that.

By the way, what you did - I just wanted to say thanks, it's a nice gesture.

Still can't quite wrap my head around why you've put my name up there, I didn't really do much though.

A Lannister always pays his debts.

I'm sorry?

No, I'm sorry.

Eduardo is briefly taken aback, but then he receives a second notification.

It's a GoT reference, I'm a nerd like that. Feel free to ignore me.

You're everywhere now, you're kind of hard to ignore.

I'm sure you could if you put your mind to it.

Maybe I'll just spam your messages inbox instead.

You might have made a tactical error by accepting my request.

I'll risk it.

In return, I expect you to extol my virtues to everyone you meet in New York.

That won't be hard, every intern here seems to be on Facebook. Networking has never been so convenient.

Huh. How's the internship?

Honestly, Eduardo is glad for the practical experience, but he's not completely enamoured by the whole internship thing. He's starting to realise that he may never be the kind of businessman his father is, or wants him to be, and so he's using his time to work out what exactly he plans to do with his future.

Who knows, maybe he'll find and invest in the next Facebook.

Great! I'm learning a lot.

Ignore all the photos that show me drinking and making nice with other interns, stock variation analysis is what I'm all about.

I'll take your word for it, Saverin.

It wouldn't be the last conversation Eduardo has with Mark, but their interactions seem forever limited to online messages – by the time Eduardo finishes his internship and *graduates magna cum laude* from Harvard with his Economics degree, Mark's already making his way through business spheres, his schedule leaving little time for proper

conversation, and Eduardo's soon off to Singapore to work for a promising firm, while keeping an eye out for news on Facebook's meteoric rise and new tech start-ups that follow its heels.

His father is pleased. Even more so when he realises that the Facebook shares Mark Zuckerberg has given to Facebook's list of contributors ‘in acknowledgement of services rendered' means that Eduardo is suddenly a great deal wealthier, but that's another matter entirely.

(‘Have a good life, Wardo' seems so very final. What should he take from that?

Aside from the fact that no one's called him Wardo since, and Mark still calls him ‘Saverin'?)

Chapter End Notes

I'm pretty sure that Cassandra has been infused by the spirit of the tsn kinkmeme - either that or I have shamelessly stolen her reaction to the Phoenix and Eduardo from somewhere on LJ. Then again, she's probably not the only person thinking it, right?

PART THREE

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

XI.

Sean Parker is going to meet Mark Zuckerberg, and he is twenty minutes late.

This doesn't worry him, as experience has taught him that his reputation, when it doesn't proceed him, creates a certain expectation that he is loath to disappoint. For someone that's been involved in two big internet companies, and suffered the indignities of losing one and being kicked out of another, Sean doesn't bring himself to worry too much about the past. That chapter of his life is over, to be used as a stepping stone into a new endeavour. Facebook might be the next big thing – and, if fate smiles upon him once again, Sean might be at the helm of a third company.

It's not a lie that Sean is interested in Mark Zuckerberg, for he would readily admit to being a fan – the problem lies with the unspoken hopes at the back of Sean's mind, which he avoids contemplating too seriously. Sean never turns down the chance to foster new connections, and the founders and contributors of Facebook are promising on this point alone. Future pathways are mere conjecture at this point.

Sean has selected the hip and trendy Tribeca restaurant 66 as the perfect choice for a meeting with these college students. The restaurant caters to a young crowd which Sean is acquainted with, not to mention the staff, so he is comfortable working within the space. Sean has looked into Mark and Mark's friends, and doubtless some of them will have done the same, so he intends to exercise what charm he possesses and make a good impression, for Sean never goes into a situation unprepared if he can help it.

How Mark Zuckerberg and his friends act within the setting will also tell Sean a great deal about them. These are college kids who've stumbled onto something great, but Sean's been navigating the scene for a while and has the experience and the connections to prove it. He can just imagine the seven of them awaiting his arrival, discussing what this meeting could mean for them.

Sean's imagination could never do their actual conversation justice.

"...So, do you think they're gonna card us?"

"Oliver, look at Cam and I. Do you think we ever get carded? No, we do not, because–"

"–Because you're six foot two and blah blah blah, we've heard all of this before. Erica, is it just me or is there way too much testosterone at this table?"

"It's not just you, I have to agree. Mark, are you seriously reading a book?"

"You're asking the wrong question, Erica. What you should be asking Mark is why he had to wear his usual getup here. Mark, look at all the people around us with their cocktails and their Prada. This is a repeat of the Thiel meeting, and I'm embarrassed to be sitting next to you."

"Look Cam, we've already talked about this before – deal with it."

"God, I can't believe you're going to be the CEO, this is either going to go really well or horribly wrong."

"Hey Mark, when did you get a cocktail? What the hell are you drinking?"

"It's an Appletini."

"Since when do you drink Appletini's? Since when where you aware that Appletini's existed?"

"Divya, your lack of faith in my ability to be an adult is discouraging."

When Sean waltzes into 66 he becomes a whirlwind of cheerful greetings and sheer magnetism. He says hello to the hostess, hugs another waitress, shakes the hands of a businessman and kisses the man's girlfriend on the cheek. Sean may be 22 and currently unemployed, but he is a proficient entrepreneur, and he's learnt how to work a room to his benefit.

While his dance seems to come to an end once he arrives at Mark's table, in reality it's overtaken by a more nuanced performance. Sean starts by allowing how pleased he's feeling to reflect in the smile he shoots them all with.

"Let me guess," he says, surveying the people before him before gravitating towards the twins. "You two must be Cameron and Tyler. And that makes you Divya, and the lovely ladies Cassandra and Erica. Oliver, hello! And Mark, it's great to meet you."

He shakes everyone's hands in turn, and aside from the chilly reserve of Divya Narendra, everyone seems pleased or interested to see him – and then he comes to Mark, and Sean finds that it is somewhat discomforting to be confronted with Mark's poker face.

"It's good to meet you too," Mark says, shaking his hand briefly. His grip is firm, and Sean returns it in kind, and his eyes move up to meet Mark's gaze directly.

The first thing that hits him is that Mark's eyes don't belong to a college kid. They're a bit too clear, a bit too knowing for Sean to meet them for long.

The second thing that occurs to Sean is that he may have miscalculated when setting up this meeting and being fashionably late. He doesn't appear to have made Mark nervous or expectant or even offended, and Mark's casual disregard of Sean's impending appearance doesn't escape his notice– Mark is, after all, the only one with a drink in front of him, and there is a paperback left half-open on the table to his right that seems to have been met with the majority of his attention prior to this meeting.

"I hope I haven't kept you all waiting for too long," Sean says to the group as a whole, although he directs his gaze to Divya, who appears unimpressed but willing to withhold judgment for the time being.

Mark's smile is a mere suggestion at this point. "It's alright," he says, sitting back down. "We've been enjoying ourselves, and I had a book."

"By the looks of it, a very engrossing one! It doesn't escape my notice, however, that this table is lacking in refreshments. Tori," Sean says abruptly as he turns to a passing waitress.

"Hey baby boy," she says coyly in return.

Sean returns her smile with interest. "Can you bring out some things? The lacquered pork with that ginger confit? Tuna tartar and lobster claws, that'll get us started. Cassandra, Erica, any drink preferences?"

"We're partial to red wine, but Mark's delved into the cocktail selection, maybe we should do the same?" Erica says slowly.

"Appletinis for the first round then?" Sean asks.

Once the food has been laid out, Sean plays the part of engaging host, coaxing smiles and answering questions about his experiences as he launches into a spiel on his work and the nature of the business. Oliver and Cassandra and the twins are engrossed by his story - Erica and Divya are clearly interested but far more reserved in showing it.

Mark spends a great deal of his time listening to Sean's words with half an ear, nodding at particular parts and occasionally drawing on a napkin. Sean tells story after story about life in Silicon Valley, and parties at Stanford and LA, and friends who have become millionaires, and how he's looking forward to seeing Mark in California, and the most that Mark does is ask a few questions, leaving the floor for his friends to do the talking.

Sean honestly doesn't know what to make of him. He tries another tack. "So, tell me about your progress on Facebook."

Cassandra folds her hands in her lap. "Well, we're in over 30 schools at the moment, and have about 75,000 members."

"And what about the strategy you're using?" Sean addresses this to Mark directly.

Mark looks up from the school of fish he's drawing out on the folded napkin before him. "The Little Big Horn manoeuvre got us Baylor in Texas," he says mildly. "A friend of mine once ran the idea across me and it did the job in this instance."

Sean whistles. "Nice. And you've avoided monetising the site so far?"

"Mark doesn't want ads just yet," Tyler says dryly.

Sean shakes his head. "Of course not, you wouldn't want to introduce that into the equation *now*. Facebook is cool, and that's what it's got going for it. You don't want to ruin it with ads!" He leans forward and cocks his head to one side. "Who lets the greatest party on campus be answerable to a 1pm curfew? That's just not done - you don't know how big Facebook can get or how far it can go, so don't go setting the limits just yet. A million dollars isn't cool, you know what's cool?"

"You?" Divya asks.

"World peace?" Oliver offers.

Sean looks at them oddly, and smirks. "I was thinking more on the lines of a *billion* dollars."

That suitably shuts everyone up.

"That's where you could be headed," Sean says, leaning back in his chair and folding his arms. "A billion dollar valuation. It's now just a case of avoiding bad advice, because otherwise you might have well just come up with a chain of very successful *yoghurt* shops. When you go fishing you can catch a lot of fish, or a big fish, and what kind of guy would hang up a photo of himself with fourteen trout?"

"It's always some three thousand pound monstrosity," Cassandra says.

"Exactly." Sean salutes her with his drink.

"You always did have a way with analogies," Mark says.

Before Sean can say anything in response to that, Divya places his glass onto the table with a clink. "*Well*," he says, "after all *that* I'm going to be very disappointed if we don't all become billionaires, Zuckerberg - but you know, no pressure or anything."

Most of the table laugh at this, Sean included, and Mark smiles slowly. "I'll try to remember that," he says, before meeting Sean's eye and nodding respectfully, just the once.

Once the bill is paid (split between them all, because Mark insists that Sean shouldn't foot the bill of such a large party) Sean shakes everyone's hands and makes a point of telling Mark that he looks forward to seeing him and what he does in the future. Mark shrugs and murmurs something vague about moving out when the time is right, and Sean guesses that's the most he can expect.

Altogether it's not an unpleasant evening, but Sean is left wondering whether he'd done what he'd came there for, and whether he got through to Mark at all.

Back in the restaurant, Cameron rests an arm on Mark's bony shoulder (to the amusement of everyone there, as he's at least a head taller than Mark). "That was interesting. Parker's one hell of a storyteller."

"Did you see how he waltzed into this place? Who does he think he is, Frank Sinatra?" Divya says, lip curling.

"I thought he was nice enough, Tyler says.

"He crashed out of two sizeable internet companies in a rather spectacular fashion, and he has a reputation with drugs," Erica points out. "I have to admit though, after meeting him in person I agree with Tyler. He's nice enough for an acquaintance."

"Could be fishing for more than just an acquaintance," Divya mutters.

"It's called networking," Cassandra says, "and I hope it hasn't slipped your notice that, for all his faults, Sean Parker has made a name for himself and been embroiled in the industry longer than you have."

Divya looks disgruntled by this, but Erica is thoughtful. "He said he was looking forward to seeing us in Silicon Valley," she says. "Just to clarify, did anyone mention that we're actually sticking around in Boston for the time being?"

Mark shrugs and polishes off his Appletini. "I'm sure he'll realise that eventually."

XII.

Christy Lee gets an invite to a party at Facebook's headquarters in Boston after a friend of Alice's lands a job as a programmer. She's pretty impressed with the set-up when she gets there, because it resembles less of a drunken frat party and more of an upbeat gathering of friends, and somebody's put an effort into making the event classy and understated, which she can appreciate. She has a suspicion, after meeting the CFO Cassandra Uberti and the graphic designer Erica Albright among the crowd, that Facebook isn't entirely a nerd outfit as she'd first expected, and has at least the benefits of people with good taste. The building has a Facebook wall that guests have taken to scrawling messages on, and an open bar, and dancing and music and gorgeous lanterns and fairy lights that put the room to an advantage that no harsh fluorescence would ever do justice.

Oliver Kirby, who is wearing an honest to god bowtie, seems to take pleasure in in introducing people to each other or jumpstarting conversations around the room, and she's equally impressed with Facebook's spokesperson when he gets her mingling with people that aren't her usual crowd, and who turn out to be decent conversationalists and even fun to hang

out with. Some programmers might actually be the live-hard-party-hard type, which is eye-opening because Christy has comes to expect this kind of vibrancy and zest for life from the med students she knows, whose all-nighters are due to cramming and late-night revelries.

She and Alice have a good time, and spend the next few hours meeting friends and making new ones (and going on Facebook to add people and photos). She spots Mark Zuckerberg across the other side of the room, talking earnestly with Divya Narendra, but doesn't get the chance to speak with him, and amuses herself by flirting outrageously with Facebook's head programmer, Joseph Chen, who's cuter than she thought he'd be.

His attractiveness is heightened by the fact that he's unlikely to descend into the throes of Yellow Fever, which is something Christy occasionally deals with when dating non-Asian guys, and while she's not sure where this could be going, she's here to have a good time and Joe has a nice smile and a good sense of humour.

"Don't expect me to whisper sweet Chinese endearments into your ear," she whispers to him as she drags him into one of the empty rooms away from the party.

"Wouldn't dream of it." She feels Joseph's smirk against her neck. "You honestly think *I* speak Chinese? My language skills may be limited to English and the occasional Cantonese insult, but I'm perfectly willing to whisper binary code to you, if that's more your thing."

"You're such a nerd. Take off your trousers," Christy orders. They shut the door behind them and fumble around in the darkness, Christy's hands in Joseph's hair and Joseph's hands on her shoulders. They soon tumble over a couch and onto the floor, which isn't very sexy, but Joseph is enthusiastically making out with Christy by this point and she doesn't take much notice of anything besides the fact that Joseph is *very* good with his hands, and maybe this has something to do with a dexterity exercised on computer keyboards.

Unfortunately, they don't get much farther than that, because after a few minutes of aggressive fondling the door snaps open with a bang and they both freeze from their place on the floor.

"You can't just walk away after saying that-"

"Look, Erica, just forget it – let it go."

There's shuffling within the room, and it dawns on Christy that the corner that she and Joseph inhabit is located behind the couch and out of the line of sight of the door and the rest of the room. If there's anything mortifying about this situation, it's the idea of a quarrel going on while she and Joseph are forced to listen in uneasy silence. If they're lucky, neither person will notice that anything is amiss, but knowing her luck they'll probably notice a high heel shoe sticking out from behind the couch.

It gets worse when Christy realises that the woman speaking is Erica Albright, who's talking to *Mark Zuckerberg* –she suddenly feels glad that she hasn't gotten around to taking Joseph's pants off yet.

"I know that you're probably kicking yourself about mentioning it," Erica is whispering, "but if there's something that's bothering you, you can talk to us about it. Cameron's worried, and I'm worried-"

"You and your boyfriend don't need to worry, because I am fine, I am *perfectly* content-" Mark cuts her off.

"Yes, but being content and being happy isn't the same thing, is it?"

"I have every reason to be happy!"

"And yet you're not!"

"Don't tell me how I should feel, Albright," Mark says, quiet and irate. "*You* of all people do not get to tell me how to feel."

In the darkness Christy feels Joseph's hand grasp her own, and she clutches it tightly and feels her heart beat wildly in her chest.

"You hoped that Facebook would bring people together," Erica says. "You told me that once, do you remember? I always wondered if you meant to imply that something had happened, something that would rip people apart. Tell me what I should deduce from that?"

The sound of Mark's groan is audible in the room. "Why is it that you're always the one that cuts right to the chase?"

"I've learnt to do so, you don't talk enough about these things as it is, Mark. What kind of friend do you think I am?"

"A nosy one."

"If you had a falling out with anyone, it must have been before college, right? Do you think there's a chance of some kind of reconciliation now?"

"I highly doubt it," Mark says cynically.

"How can you be sure?" Erica prods.

"Oh, I think he made his feelings *very* clear when he left the country."

The ensuing silence is overbearing, and Christy finds that she's holding her breath and listening just as avidly as Joseph is beneath her.

"Look," Mark says, his voice tired, "that's all I'm going to say about this, alright? It's over, it's done."

"Sorry, Mark," Erica says, hushed.

"You shouldn't have to apologise for anything. I've learnt that it takes two to fuck up a relationship, and in the end we probably both did things we regretted. It's all behind me. Now,

can we go back to the party and pretend this conversation never happened?"

"Yeah, okay. Look, Mark, I'm sorry, but you're my friend and I worry sometimes. I'll push when it hurts if I think you need it, but I'll back off it that's what you want."

"It's one of your admirable qualities, even if I kind of hate you for it."

A sliver of light travels across the floor, and soon the door closes behind them, and Christy and Joseph sit up.

"Wow. And here I was thinking Mark wasn't a romantic. Is that seriously what we just heard?" Christy says in the darkness.

"Mark has depths." Joseph pushes himself off the floor and absently pulls Christy to her feet. "Honestly though, I did not see that coming, and I've known Mark since high school."

"It almost sounded like something out of a book," Christy muses. "Makes me feel sorry for Mark. He sounds kind of gutted by the whole thing."

"...Do you think I should talk to him about it?" Joseph asks, suddenly terrified. "God, I am not equipped for this, I've spent too much time with repression-of-major-emotions Mark and guess-my-feelings-based-on-zero-inflections-and-minute-facial-expressions Mark to be comfortable talking to him about his love life. It's not something Phillips Exeter has prepared me for, you know?"

"It won't come to that!" Christy snaps as she turns to stab Joseph's chest with a manicured finger. "Remember, we didn't hear anything, because we just tumbled into this empty room two seconds ago! No one's going to expect you to provide wise counsel for Zuckerberg's love life! Got it?"

"Got it, good idea." Joseph's panic winds down, soon replaced by an uncharacteristic uncertainty. "Uh, question though - has anything we *haven't* heard broken the mood?"

"Sort of," Christy sighs.

"Ah well," Joseph says good-naturedly. "It was my privilege to be able to eavesdrop on private conversations together and hold you in my arms."

Christy is amused by Joseph's gallantry. "You can make it up to me next week," she says, before throwing Joseph a saucy smile and pulling him out of the room and back into the party.

Even after establishing that *nothing happened*, Christy can't help but meddle, because she's a sucker for what she perceives to be some kind of tragic, doomed love affair. "You deserve to be happy," Christy says to Mark two months later, as she clasps his shoulder and bestows on him a compassionate smile.

Mark appears concerned by this. "Um, why?"

"No reason," she says, as Joseph wheezes in the background and scrambles for his inhaler. "Incidentally, my friend Alice is throwing a party for a select gathering at her place, you should come. We didn't really get the chance to chat at the Facebook party, so I have to introduce you to her properly." She pauses. "Her brother, too."

"...I'm overseeing some developments and upgrades we're implementing for the site, but I'll let you know if I'm free?" Mark says hesitantly.

"See that you do," Christy says, before nodding to Joseph. "I'll catch up with some friends while you finish up here."

"Sure," Joseph says as he pockets his inhaler and avoids making eye contact with Mark.

Christy Lee, irrepressible and fabulous, absconds from the office in a triumphant chorus of elation and goodwill, leaving behind one fairly alarmed CEO, one mortified and lovelorn programmer, about twelve or so interested onlookers, and traces of her floral perfume.

"Are you two *dating*?" Mark hisses when she's out of earshot.

"If only I were so lucky," Joseph sighs. "I think she's just having a fling with me. That one is never boring."

"She told me that I 'deserve to be happy'. What did she mean by that?" Mark presses.

Oliver looks up from his newspaper. "I think it means that she wants you to be happy," he says dryly.

"Are you sure she's not trying to insinuate something else? Like, 'you deserve to be happy, because you won't get the chance to be so for much longer'?"

"She's just trying to hook you up with her friend, Mark" Erica chimes in. "Or her friend's brother. I couldn't really tell what exactly she was trying to suggest, but I assume it was one or the other."

Mark massages his temples. "Just - just get back to work, all of you."

Joseph pats Mark on his shoulder. "Hey, it's all cool. I know you don't really know her, but Christy means well."

"I'll take your word for it," Mark says. "Just don't make her angry."

XIII.

(1) Eric's first impression of Facebook's main office is a good one because he likes the open floor plan - there are no cubicles, and the office consists of rows of computers and laptops and comfortable chairs. There's an actual Facebook Wall where people write messages and draw little doodles and reminders, and another wall with a mural that Erica Albright did when the office was first opened, and posters on the wall with slogans like ‘Move Fast and Break Things' and ‘What Would You Do If You Weren't Afraid?'

There are two things in the office that Eric still wonders about to this day.

The first is an algorithm written on the window next to the corner that Mark usually sits at when he's working with the rest of them.

The second is a poem scrawled on the glass wall of the Fish Bowl room:

No escaping it -

I must step on fallen leaves

To take this path

Suzuki Masajo

Eric's not entirely sure what the haiku means, but he assumes that it's significant.

(2) Eric starts working at Facebook in 2007, when the site begins its expansion to high schools. It's a great deal of work, and it's rewarding, and Eric has a front seat to the action as he discusses with his colleagues about what could happen next, and he debates the issues that surround making Facebook accessible to businesses as well as those over the age of thirteen. He knows he's a part of something big, and it's humbling – Mark Zuckerberg, his boss, is actually three years younger than he is.

(3) Mark is never called Mr Zuckerberg by the people who work for him – it's always just Mark, or Zuckerberg. Some of Mark's closer friends, who've been with him since the company's inception, refer to him by various nicknames.

Eric's favourite is a toss-up between 'He Who Must Be Pacified With Red Bull' and 'Lord Facebook'.

"I'm not *Voldemort*," Mark has taken to protesting.

(4) The hierarchy in Facebook is a strange creature. Mark's ‘inner circle' would by all accounts consist of his original founding team and other upper management personnel, but Mark doesn't have a proper office and it takes a week at Facebook for Eric to realise just how invested Mark Zuckerberg is at all levels of the company, from the board meetings to the hackathons. Sometimes it feels less like Mark is their boss and more like he's an overseer of operations.

(5) Eric comes into work at around eight every morning, and Mark will be there without fail, typing away at a laptop, only pausing to nod at him in greeting before going back to his coding and simultaneously talking into his phone about needing to talk with people down in

PR. Employees that have been with Mark from the very beginning are the most casual in their interactions with a boss that also inhabits the title of friend, but by the end of his first month Eric is disseminating the latest episode *of Lie to Me* with his boss and he's spotted two people in the office that write RPF in their spare time and squeal whenever pictures of Mark Zuckerberg and David Karp hit the net.

(It takes guts, Eric thinks, to write about that kind of thing right underneath Mark's nose.)

(6) As a young company with predominately young employees the atmosphere at Facebook is difficult to describe. Exciting, perhaps, but the excitement is tempered by the older and wiser employees, so sometimes Eric forgets that this all has its roots in college culture. Eric's heard stories about wild drinking and partying at other places – drinking and partying at Facebook might happen, sure, but most of it is done off the clock, and Mark prefers that people don't code while they're drunk "even if they're like me and do a better job when they're not sober".

To this day, Eric's not sure if Mark was joking.

(7) "One of the first things you'll learn about Mark," Yuzuki says to him when they're eating lunch, "is that he'll listen to what you have to say, even if it doesn't look like he is." Yuzuki smiles at Eric's unspoken disbelief. "You may have noticed that Mark isn't always a fan of making eye contact."

Eric chews his sandwich, and finds that he cannot disagree with his co-worker's assessment. For a man who's revolutionising how people communicate, Mark can come across as reserved in person, although if pressed to describe his boss, Eric defaults to the word ‘intense'. He's seen Mark deep in thought, and at the height of sarcasm, and excited, talking fast-paced with Oliver and Joseph.

Mark notices things, and he's a good listener, but Eric can tell that this is a conscious decision Mark makes. It's really strange, Eric thinks, to be reminded of your mother when you look at your boss, to recall how she looked when she catches sight of your bruises for the first time and sits quietly next to you as you talk.

(8) One time this guy across from Eric's table made this offhanded comment about one of the girls they work with – it's nothing Eric hasn't heard before in the presence of male programmers, but Yuzuki's sitting next to him with a pinched look on her face, and Janet five seats down looks fit to burst.

She doesn't though, because that's when the speaker – was his name Richard or Rove? – notices that Mark is standing near them and has taken off his headphones.

Mark doesn't say anything, but he gives the guy this *look,* and even though his face is emotionless Eric can tell it's one of disapproval.

"There's only enough room in this company for one asshole," Mark says eventually, "and seeing as *I* inhabit that position and am unlikely to give it up anytime soon, I suggest that you think very carefully about the things you say. You've been working here for five months, you

should know by now that lawsuits exist for a reason and that Cassandra's last fight against the patriarchy involved broken kneecaps."

Mark doesn't like the limelight and his presence is understated when the man can help it. No one, however, can accuse Mark of not looking out for his employees.

(They also can't find fault in Mark's observation skills, because the next thing he says is "I can see those camera phones back there, I'm not an idiot, and if anything turns up on YouTube people are going to be fired.")

(9) There is no formal dress code at Facebook, so it ranges from fleecy hoodies and jeans that Mark wears, to pop culture tees and smart casual clothing. So long as it's ‘appropriate' (i.e. no racist or sexist slogans, no one walking around half-naked or, you know, completely nude) it's usually okay. Eric likes being able to wear his Stars Wars shirts to work, and it's kind of funny when Mark sees them and gives him a thumbs up in approval.

(10) Three months into his job, Eric comes to work on a Monday morning and finds Mark reclining on a bean bag chair flicking through a dark blue blogging platform in his pyjamas.

Eric doesn't bat an eyelash.

XIV.

Sheryl Sandberg starts working at Facebook in 2008, and becomes the Chief Operating Officer in 2010. She's overseen the opening of Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park, and plans are underway to open an office in Hyderabad, India, as well as tentative ones elsewhere. Many people had wondered why she'd left her job at Google to work at a company that appeared to make very little revenue – but Sheryl was up for a change (and a challenge), and Facebook's profits may have been modest but they covered employee wages and the running of the site, which was a good indicator for the promise that the company held.

"This will be interesting," Mark had said when he'd shaken her hand and welcomed her after they came to an agreement on her employment. She has to agree. There are a number of things that made Facebook unusual for a tech start-up in the Silicon Valley, and an interesting environment to work in.

The most obvious is something Sheryl sees every day. Silicon Valley is a male-dominated field, but Facebook is about 60/40, and while women aren't the majority the disparity isn't as large as she thought it would be. Then again, two of the original co-founders on Facebook are women – Cassandra Uberti and Erica Albright – and Mark Zuckerberg's sister is involved with management. It's probably had some effect on the demographics, in any case.

The second is the phenomenal growth of Facebook, and the fact that instead of immediately moving to the Silicon Valley like so many start-ups before it, Facebook had remained in

Boston for the first few years even after spreading its wings from its original home in the Currier dorm of Harvard's Quad.

There are other things Sheryl notices and mulls over quietly, like the layout of the offices and the team-based activities and the hackathons that promote a culture in Facebook to work hard but not be too afraid to take risks.

She doesn't dwell on them much, however. Mostly she spends time acquainting herself with Facebook and her co-workers, and finding a way to make Facebook a success without pushing for it to be ‘too corporate', as some had undoubtedly worried would happen with her introduction.

She also spends a great deal of time working alongside Mark Zuckerberg, and seeing how the company and its CEO change as they respond to the world around them. Facebook has grown over the years under Mark's watchful eye, and he's now in his late twenties but he still possesses a sweet face and perceptive eyes. People can be intimidated by him, but Sheryl has learnt to cut right through that and get to know everyone at Facebook, including Mark.

She soon learns that her boss knows how to take a step back and be a little less intense, a little more approachable, when it comes to his employees. His relationship with the press is another matter, but while Mark is shy he can step up for Facebook's benefit, and Oliver Kirby's been involved with that since the beginning and they work well together when it comes to covering strengths and weaknesses.

Despite all the possible pitfalls of the job, Mark is extremely competent in his position at the head of a company. Zuckerberg assumes many roles – computer programmer, innovator, even artist – but there's no denying that he is a fairly savvy businessman and CEO, with a great deal of common sense. Sometimes when Sheryl talks with him about Facebook she forgets that he dropped out of Harvard at the age of nineteen – he is youthful, but old in the way that he surveys and approaches issues, and works to overcome what he perceives to be his faults.

This self-reflective quality of Mark's is what makes Sheryl pause when she prepared to leave the office one Friday afternoon and sees him sitting on a bean bag chair with his headphones following the curve of his neck.

"Hey Mark," she says, "I know you're worried about the reaction to the update, but don't stay back for too long."

Mark looks up from his laptop to share with her a small smile. "It's almost 5:30pm, you should be the one keeping that in mind."

Sheryl leaves the office on Wednesday at half past five so that she can stick to a schedule that lets her balance family and the pursuit of a fulfilling, full-time career. Mark, on the other hand, never leaves earlier than 6:30pm, and sometimes he doesn't leave the office at all. There's a small room upstairs set aside for the express purpose of allowing Mark to catch a few hours in between tasks.

It's not that Mark forgets to look after himself, Sheryl thinks. It's just that Mark occasionally forgets. He's too focused for his own good sometimes.

"Has Frederick been hounding you about missing breakfast?" she asks.

"I've been falling into old habits," Mark admits.

"Be firm," Sheryl says. "We can't have you collapsing at shareholders meetings. And let me know what you think about the plans for Hyderabad, and the office in Brazil."

"On it," Mark says. "I'll see you tomorrow."

"See you!"

Mark turns back to his computer, typing away at his Facebook messages, and Sheryl peers over his shoulder at the screen before she sighs and heads for her car.

Whoever this Eduardo Saverin is, he must be important, if Mark's single-minded concentration in formulating his replies is anything to go by.

XV.

If memory serves him correctly, the first time David meets Mark Zuckerberg is at some random social network tech event in New York. David is twenty-one and ushering Tumblr into the world on the heels of the guys at Twitter, and the next thing he knows is the founder and CEO of Facebook is standing next to him with an inscrutable expression and a glass of champagne. The man is only a few years older than David, and somehow manages to be unflappable in his formal white shirt and faded blue hoodie in a way that David in his suit cannot emulate.

"Karp," Zuckerberg says in acknowledgment, "I was wondering when you'd show your face around here."

David honestly doesn't know what has lead him to deserve this reaction. He wasn't aware Zuckerberg knew he existed. "Mark Zuckerberg, I don't think we've ever been introduced," he says.

"Yet we know each other anyway, who would have thought?" Zuckerberg replies.

David bites back a grin. "Must be all this newfangled high technology getting into everyone's business."

"It's becoming a real problem," Zuckerberg agrees dryly.

In the end, David's friendship with Mark is a strange one, consisting of tech functions, texts and hilariously long-winded arguments and emerging inside jokes. They are young and driven entrepreneurs, as well as fellow dropouts (David left high school to get involved in a computer business and the rest is history) so they do have a few things in common that make them friends with vitriolic undertones (because the snark is strong in both of them).

Case in point: they're at a restaurant seven months after their first meeting, and have just narrowly escaped from Olive Garden for the safety of a nice, quiet coffee shop that sells this divine mango puree that David likes. He needs it after his ordeal. "A REAL Italian restaurant. Is that too much to ask for?" he groans.

Mark observes his surroundings with mild interest. "Sometimes I worry that you're almost too hipster to function."

"You don't mean that."

"No, I don't, but occasionally I think it."

"Sometimes I have a hard time believing that you're older than I am."

"I'm not the one that pretended to be older than I actually was for a few years in order to get my foot into the industry."

David tries not to pout. Despite his jokes on the contrary, Mark often comes across as older than his actual age due to sheer force of personality, which is annoying because David still gets carded at bars. "You've had your fair share of difficulties," he points out. "Is it true that VCs used to infiltrate lectures so they could speak to you about acquiring Facebook?"

Mark pulls a face. "They were annoying. I used to give them the slip while Oliver exercised his role as spokesperson and spared me the experience."

"Aw, your life has been so hard," David simpers, before breaking character so he can laugh at the look on Mark's face. "But really, I'm surprised anyone took you seriously, you still look like a college undergrad and it's been ten years since you were a freshman at Harvard."

Mark smirks. "Don't you read the newspapers? It's been reported that the hoodie gives me magical powers."

"You're so full of shit, Zuckerberg," David decides.

Mark shrugs. "I've compromised on what I wear for functions, and I wear whatever I like when I'm working. Besides, people expect to see a hoodie now, apparently it's my trademark."

David rolls the cuffs of his shirt up as their food arrives at the table. "All I'm saying is that I own more suits than you do, Mark. You should think about investing in a better wardrobe. Didn't you wear that shirt earlier this week?"

"I own five versions of this same shirt, I cycle through them," Mark says as he leans back in his chair.

David whistles. "No wonder the media hates you; it must be hard to get good photos if you're wearing the same things over and over again."

Mark raised his glass in a mock-toast. David shakes his head. "You do know that one of the reasons they follow you around is because they're interested in the personal life of the world's

youngest billionaire, right?"

"If they wanted to know what I get up to, all they have to do is check my Facebook wall," Mark says. "Or my Twitter feed."

"You have a Twitter account?" David says doubtfully.

Mark pauses over his food. "Sure I do."

"But the only Mark Zuckerberg on Twitter is this spoof account," David says, confused. His expression clears when Mark doesn't meet his eyes. "Mark Elliot Zuckerberg, you mean for me to believe that you've made a spoof account for the express purpose of critiquing yourself online?"

"I won't have you believe anything." Mark says. "Someone would have done it eventually, so I thought I should get in on it myself. It's very therapeutic, actually."

Only Mark Zuckerberg would make an account to make fun of himself because 'someone else would have done it eventually'.

What makes the thing even funnier is that the tweets are hilarious and *cutting*, like Mark's second thoughts have bloomed onto the screen and aren't to be reined in at attacking even their own.

David is curious, and it's with this in mind that leads him to make a Facebook account under an alias with the barest amount of information he can get away with. After a few days Facebook recommends that he befriends Mark Zuckerberg, which forces David to question just how much of a manipulative bastard Mark is. It's either egocentrism or coincidence, or perhaps simply downright scary.

David learns a month later that Mark's made a Tumblr account.

He hasn't discovered it.

Yet.

Happy Birthday David,

I got you alcohol. You can drink that now, right?

Don't fuck up your site, I need the competition.

MZ

David tilts his head back and laughs.

"What is it?" one of his programmers asks from where he's putting up the Tumblr logo onto the wall.

"Just a birthday gift - Mark's being sentimental," David remarks. "Look, Dustin."

Dustin Moskovitz, who orders baked goods for the whole office and is usually in charge of the official Tumblr staff blog, makes sure that the logo is evenly positioned before he comes to David's side and squints at the piece of paper. "Yep, that sounds like Mark," he says, snickering as he takes a photo of the note and the bottle of whisky. "FYI, you're totally putting this onto your blog."

"I'll hashtag it with a heart," David promises.

EDUARDO

Eduardo knows it's not going to be a good day when he comes to and finds himself in a hospital bed. Granted, it's not entirely clear to him *why* he's in a hospital, but the last thing he remembers is driving through Silicon Valley from his hotel to a shareholder's meeting, and losing control of his car when the brakes refused to respond on a turn, so he can hazard a guess. *Ugh*. He aches all over, his head is bandaged, and his right temple is pounding softly. "This isn't good," he groans.

"And you haven't even seen a mirror yet," someone says on his left. Eduardo shifts his head on the pillow, and blinks. Mark Zuckerberg himself is perched on the very edge of a neighbouring bed, looking decidedly real for a hallucination. His hands are hidden away in the pockets of his grey hoodie, and he is pale, with faint bags under his uneasy eyes.

"…This might just be the pain meds that I'm on," Eduardo says, "but how and why are you here?"

"I've been wondering that myself," Mark mutters. Something chimes in his pocket, and he pulls out a phone and taps at it with his thumb distractedly. "They won't let me leave," he explains, staring down at the screen. "The nurse said you'd be fine, but when I tried checking out on my own she wouldn't hear it. I've been loitering around ever since."

"Wait, are – are you okay?" Eduardo asks, alarmed, because Mark's presence has suddenly taken on a deeply horrifying turn. He looks over Mark intently, and notes that there's something about the way that Mark is hunched over as if he's protecting his ribs that worries him, not to mention that *two of his fingers are bandaged*. He hadn't noticed that when they'd been secreted away in Mark's pockets. "Jesus Christ!" he exclaims.

Mark's head shoots up, and he notices where Eduardo's line of sight is aimed. "Oh, no, it's nothing," he hastens to say, hiding away his hands in his pockets again.

"What the hell happened?!"

"You don't remember?"

"No!"

Mark's sock-covered feet slowly furl and unfurl. "…You may have, sort of, hit me with your car," he admits.

"No," Eduardo says, aghast.

"Well, the impression I'm getting is that it wasn't on *purpose*, so I won't hold it against you."

Eduardo covers his face with his hands and tries not to scream or rail at the unfairness of it all. "Look" he says, flustered. "I'm sorry, I am *so* sorry. I'll cover the medical bills, anything you need."

"Don't mention it, "Mark waves away his words impatiently.

"Two of your fingers are broken!"

"It's only a flesh wound."

"…You didn't seriously just make a Python reference."

"I saw my chance and I took it."

Eduardo's laugh is a little too panicky for comfort. "I don't understand you," he says helplessly. "I'm half-expecting you to sue me."

"No. Just – no." Mark's face pales even further, and Eduardo can't quite decipher what Mark is thinking but he knows that he's managed to say the wrong thing.

He clears his throat, self-conscious of his hospital gown and the small collection of bruises and lacerations he's collected from the accident he assumes has taken place. "I don't remember much of what happened," he says slowly, "but I'm guessing that it must have been traumatic."

Mark shifts indecisively on the bed. "It – look, of the two of us I was the only one capable of walking away from the scene and calling emergency services, because there was blood – like, a lot of it, turns out head wounds bleed a lot even when they aren't terribly serious or intrusive – and I had to drag you out of your car while praying that I wasn't going to fuck up your spine or something, and I spent most of the ambulance ride over thinking that you were going to die. I have every right to feel traumatised."

"Sorry to worry you," Eduardo says.

"Don't ever do it again, I'm not cut out for this sort of thing," Mark says.

"I promise."

"I won't forget."

"Right." Eduardo smiles tremulously. "So! Mark. I was hoping to meet under less dramatic circumstances in real life, you know."

Mark bites his lip. "Our lives are worthy of film."

"Investors and entrepreneurs don't usually get blockbusters devoted to them, but I see your point." Eduardo moves uncomfortably in the bed and winces. "Do you think they'll let me leave anytime soon?"

"I'll get you a nurse." Mark slips off the bed and heads for the door, and Eduardo doesn't want him to leave (shouldn't there be a button or something he could press?) but Mark's looking decidedly uncomfortable and probably needs a moment in the corridor without looking at him and having flashbacks to the accident.

"Hey, wait," Eduardo can't help but call after him. He manages a passable grin when Mark turns back around. "I can't let you leave without a proper introduction, right? An unforeseen accident is no reason to be impolite. Eduardo Saverin, it's a pleasure to meet you in the flesh."

"And I'm Mark Zuckerberg, but you already knew that, didn't you?" Mark says, looking less ashen and almost pleased as he slips out into the corridor.

An hour later, after Mark has bullied his way out of the hospital and signed all the necessary forms, he waits with Eduardo outside the building for a taxi to come that will take Eduardo to his cousin's apartment. Aside from a broken rib or two and stitches in his head, Eduardo's not doing too badly, although he's not sure if his current light-headedness is due to blood loss or Mark's presence.

"Just to be clear," he says as he taps his foot nervously, "we've been chatting on and off over the years over the Internet, but have we ever actually...*met* before?"

"I doubt it," Mark says, effectively shutting down any discussion on hypothetical encounters during Alpha Epsilon Pi parties. "I am surprised to be meeting you though. I thought you said that you worked overseas. Singapore, right?"

"You remembered," Eduardo says, feeling inordinately pleased. "I'm currently splitting my time between New York and Singapore, but I had to take a detour in order to make it to a shareholder's meeting, hence my presence in Silicon Valley."

"A shareholder's meeting?" Mark asks, an undecipherable expression on his face.

"Yes. It's a funny story," Eduardo says, scratching the back of his neck. "Turns out this guy from college that I've never properly met gave me shares in his company, and I've considered it a personal failing of mine not to have attended any of the meetings before. I thought I'd fix that."

Eduardo has always prided himself on his ability to get to the core of other people's personalities - something he'd picked up from his father - but Mark Zuckerberg has always been difficult, especially given that he's been relying on message logs that are pleasant, distant things that don't seem to imply Mark would ever be interested to meet in person. Even now, it's near impossible for Eduardo to guess what emotion - if any - Mark is trying to convey - and something tells him that he's not as good as he thinks he is with people because for all intents and purposes Mark's got a handle on *him* instead (if the all-too knowing look in his eyes is any indication).

"I'm sure that whoever he is won't take offence," Mark says eventually. He reaches out a hand and pats Eduardo's shoulder gingerly (and, wow, actual physical contact, Eduardo's reading into Mark's character needs serious adjusting). "Also, your taxi's here."

Eduardo starts, and then huffs in disappointment as he gets to his feet. "Well, this is me then. While I'm off to my cousin's place to recuperate under her care for the next 24 hours, I hope you'll be doing the same," he warns.

Mark shakes his head. "I have to go and placate everyone at Facebook before TMZ breaks the news of my untimely demise."

Eduardo nibbles at his lip anxiously. "And then you're going to go home and rest," he insists, "and call me tomorrow to reassure me of your continued existence."

"For someone who's come out of an accident you're remarkably bossy," Mark says, not unkindly.

"I like to think that I'm charming and occasionally pushy," Eduardo says as he carefully steps into the back of the cab, "and you forget that I was present to see how you handled the nurses there when you really wanted to leave. So, this is me informing you that you should really give me your number. That's what people do when they have accidents, exchange contact details."

"For insurance purposes?"

"Exactly." Eduardo leans out the open window of the cab, mindful of the twinges in his chest. "And if you're not forthcoming I'm sure I can go Google it."

Mark rolls his eyes. "My calls are fielded through a secretary, so chances are I'm not going to pick up," he says, but he does procure a business card from his wallet in exchange for one of Eduardo's. "Is that all?" Mark asks, the hint of a smile suggested by the curve of his mouth.

"Well, since you're hard to track down by phone," Eduardo finds himself blurting out, "I may actually have to ensure that I haven't irrevocably traumatised you in person, so! Dinner?"

"Dinner?" Mark is looking as close to astonished as he gets.

"I have to start *somewhere* in making it up to you," Eduardo says. "You still a vegetarian?"

"Yes, but-" Mark opens his mouth, closes it, and then shakes his head as if to clear his thoughts. It's a small gesture, but it conveys his confusion perfectly, and makes Eduardo feel guilty for pushing.

"It's okay if you're busy," he hears himself saying. "It's just that I feel directly responsible and guilty and that's not something easily brushed aside. You have to let me repay you somehow."

"It's not about repayment." Mark says, but he's wavering. "Would - would your guilt be diminished if I said yes?"

Eduardo shrugs. "Possibly. But I make no promises, I'm a naturally guilty person."

"Right." Mark swats away a wayward strand of hair from his eyes. "I suppose I can endure a dinner." He bites his lip, and Eduardo knows that the cab driver is probably getting super-impatient by this point, but he's not worrying about being polite because he's waiting for Mark to say what he's been holding back.

"What is it?" Eduardo encourages.

"Nothing, it's just...you won't be driving, will you?" Mark says, and that's when Eduardo knows that everything's going to be okay.

"Too soon!" Eduardo purses his lips, and breaks out into a hopeless smile. "That's terrible, you can't joke about that!"

"It's a valid concern."

"You are a horrible person."

"I came to terms with that ages ago," Mark says.

Eduardo pauses, and bites the inside of his cheek. "You're really not an asshole, Mark," he says. "You don't have to justify yourself to me. I know you and your caustic sense of humour well enough to know *that* much. Plus, not going to lie, I kind of like that about you."

"Those are dangerous words, but it's good to know that you don't possess the frame of mind to kill me or destroy my life's work," Mark says in a monotone, but his tone is misleading because he looks like he's trying not to return Eduardo's grin.

(Even finding out that someone had cut the brakes on his rental car doesn't do anything to dampen Eduardo's good mood for the rest of the day.)

Despite instructions on taking it easy, Eduardo's feeling well enough after a night's rest to make good on his offer of dinner to Mark, and after dismissing his cousin's concerns and going down to the police station to make his statement, Eduardo has his cab pull up in front of Facebook's headquarters in Menlo Park at six. He's feeling better by then, especially given that he's wearing a tailored Prada suit and feeling a lot more put together than yesterday.

(His injuries garner a few looks, but everyone seems especially curious once Mark's made his way downstairs to meet him. "Eduardo Saverin, right?" one young man says as he rushes in front of Mark and eyes Eduardo up and down. "Well, I can't say I was expecting you, but I suppose I shouldn't be surprised - there was a bit of an incident yesterday when our CEO turned up for an annual shareholder's meeting and only informed us *after* it had finished that he had broken fingers and bruised ribs." He places his hands on his hips. "Did Twitter hire you? Because if so, you're a shit assassin."

"God, Oliver, shut up," Mark says, long-suffering.

"Perhaps I have to reconsider doing business in the US, if this is what you expect from competitors," Eduardo comments gravely.

"Only the desperate ones." Oliver grins and shakes Eduardo's hand. "Hey, this is going to sound like a strange question, but were you ever into that phase when everyone was getting into the North Face brand?"

"That's it," Mark says as he carefully steers Eduardo away, "we're leaving now.")

Mark is unimpressed when he finds out that Eduardo's used a favour to get reservations for an upscale restaurant in Silicon Valley, and so is the maître d when he takes in Mark's hoodie and jeans. It says a lot that the server refrains from comment, but that might just be because he recognises Facebook's CEO and doesn't want to put his establishment at risk by turning away the world's youngest billionaire.

Eduardo murmurs something polite, and it's his turn to casually steer Mark out of the restaurant.

"Just because you're treating doesn't mean that you need to take me to the most expensive restaurant you can find," Mark chides him.

"I had a feeling that you wouldn't be impressed," Eduardo says. "They've got a good lobster dish, so it was worth a shot. We'll move onto Plan B." He grasps Mark's arm and tugs him gently.

The second restaurant is a small Japanese place tucked away at the end of the street, and they claim a small booth that has a nice view through the window, and place their orders. Then they just talk, about anything and everything, and it's even better than their Facebook messages because Eduardo can see how Mark's eyes brighten when he talks about something

important, and the way that he gestures with his hands, and their conversation flows easily and becomes a volley of words, a relentless tide of observations and jokes. Mark is surprised to hear about the companies that Eduardo's worked with ("LinkedIn? Saverin, you traitor, this is Divya and Google all over again") and Eduardo is unsurprised to hear about Mark's successes ("I do read newspapers, Mark, my father keeps me updated about Facebook's office in Sao Paolo as if he was directly responsible for Brazil's social networking interests").

Eventually things come full circle.

"It's good to know that you're doing well," Mark says over their dessert. "Aside from the head wound, obviously, but it appears that you're able to soldier on even if you do have a broken rib or two."

"Oh, I'm fine," Eduardo says dismissively. "I was more concerned by the fact that someone cut the brakes on my car and I hit a bystander more than anything."

Mark's fork misses his mouth and drops down onto the table. "Someone did *what*."

Eduardo raises an eyebrow. "You didn't know?"

"If by that you mean that nobody has thought to mention to me that the car involved in the incident was *tampered* with, then no." Mark bites his lip. "Shit, do you have enemies or something who have sworn to kill you?"

"Not that I know," Eduardo snorts. "Although now that you mention it, I've been getting some weird looks from the Instagram executives."

"That might just be a Facebook thing," Mark says. "Ugh, you're an idiot and Oliver and I have made assassin jokes in exceedingly poor taste. Maybe you should get a bodyguard."

"That's rich coming from you, Mr 'I walked into a convenience store and got held up without the robbers realising I was a billionaire'," Eduardo points out.

"Some things never change," Mark says wistfully, "even when I try."

"I'm not even going to ask why you sound nostalgic about being robbed," Eduardo says as he calls for the cheque (which becomes a moot point because even though Eduardo foots the bill, Mark meets his amount to the dollar with the tip he leaves behind, much to the delight of the restaurant).

"I'm getting the feeling that you like having the last word," Eduardo muses as he gives in to the urge to tug at one of Mark's curls.

Mark pushes away his hand in mock-protest. "It's my tragic flaw, Eduardo."

"*Sooo*," Chris says sometime into the future, "let me get this straight. You accidentally hit this guy with your car, and he turns out to be a self-made billionaire and the CEO of Facebook, who just happens to be the one to give us shares in his company when we were in college and changed our lives as we know it. Not only do you avoid a lawsuit, but you also apologise by taking him out to dinner, where he manages to be interesting and quirky and strangely endearing that your love for him is consolidated before the serving of dessert. And just when things couldn't get more rom-com, you think that you might have *met* Mark Zuckerberg at Harvard this one time when he humoured your drunken ass and made an impression, and now you think the universe is trying to tell you something, like Mark is some kind of hoodie-wearing soulmate in fucking flip-flops."

"Man, why can't the universe introduce *me* to a genius computer programmer that just happens to be extremely rich?" Dustin complains.

"It's just a hunch," Eduardo argues, face flushed. "I don't know if it's him and I haven't asked, but Cassandra Uberti keeps giving me these weird looks and I think she and Oliver *know* something."

"That might just be because she's realised that she once tried to induce you into stripping," Chris says dryly.

Eduard's jaw falls open. "That was her?! Jesus, please don't tell me Mark was there, it would explain *so much* because you would not believe how difficult it is to maintain eye contact with that man sometimes."

"Wow, you are definitely in love," Dustin says, chin resting on his hand. "You should, like, make your intentions clear and slay a dragon or something."

Eduardo can't help feeling exasperated. "I don't think there are many dragons in Menlo Park."

"Do the next best thing and decimate a competitor then. I think Mark would be sufficiently wooed if you took down MySpace."

"Just ignore Dustin," Chris says, looking sorely like he needs a drink.

"No, don't ignore me," Dustin cries, "tell me *everything*, and I will bring you along to the next important event David and Mark are at so I can see the sparks fly for myself and David can give your courtship his parental approval."

"If only Obama could see me now," Chris sighs as he sits back and opens a beer, looking amused and disbelieving all at once.

Eduardo ducks his head in mild embarrassment, but he humours both his friends, and refrains from mentioning that he won't be attending any functions in the US anytime soon because he's weaselled his way into Mark's planned trip to Brazil's Facebook office.

(Yeah, Chris and Dustin can find *that* out from the newspapers and Mark's Facebook photos like everyone else.)

Chapter End Notes

And that's it! At least, unless I get around to writing something else in this 'verse :D

Acknowledgments must be made to Aaron Sorkin's original screenplay and Ben Mezrich's book 'The Accidental Billionaires', because they played an integral part when it came to fashioning this fic, and readers will probably notice references to both as they go through.

Once again, thanks to everyone that was involved in the 2014 TSN Big Bang - it was my first time and I'm really glad I gave it a go!

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